

de  
LE CID

\*

Corneille

C/22: 1400

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# LE CID

## TRAGI-COMEDIE.



A PARIS,  
Chez FRANÇOIS TARGA, au  
premier pillier de la grand' Salle du Palais,  
deuant la Chappelle, au Soleil d'or.

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M. DC. XXXVII.  
AVEC PRIVILEGE DV ROY.





CORNEILLE

HARRAP'S FRENCH CLASSICS

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# LE CID

(PIERRE)

1606

CORNEILLE

By 19 MAY 1971




EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
AND NOTES BY

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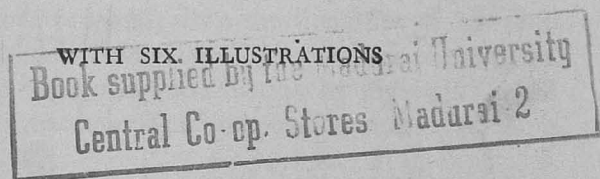
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WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS



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## INTRODUCTION

### I. CORNEILLE'S BACKGROUND

In commenting on the literature of a period one is tempted to include a number of authors in a single group. To do so makes for clarity and neatness, but the method has its dangers. Some playwrights and poets, while being typical representatives of a particular school or movement in certain respects, may well depart from its doctrines in others. Despite this, for the sake of convenience and to avoid, as it were, the unsightliness of a "blank file," writers of literary history sometimes dragoon an author into a body to which by rights he only partly belongs, overlooking or suppressing those features of his work which do not fit readily into the general pattern.

Since Pierre Corneille lived in a period of transition, he cannot be identified as completely as some of the writers of the succeeding generation with what has come to be known as the "classical age" of French literature. For all that, his work, in essentials, bears the stamp of the seventeenth century, and, since the literature of his time differs so markedly from that of the previous century, we may fittingly begin this introduction by indicating some of the factors that helped to bring about so far-reaching a change.

Filled with enthusiasm for the treasures of Greek and Latin literature, eager to develop to the full the resources of the French language, Ronsard and his fellow poets of the sixteenth century invented new metres, coined words, poured out their hearts in lyrical verse, gave free rein to

their imagination, voiced their own emotions, sang of the countryside and savoured the colour and variety of life. Their work contained much of astonishing freshness and beauty, but it also showed less admirable qualities. It was sometimes diffuse, obscure, and artificial, with little in the way of self-criticism to discipline its careless exuberance. Often, too, it was pagan in outlook and, as the century wore on, it revealed a strain of scepticism, due in part to the troublous nature of the times. It was difficult for literature to flourish in a France distracted by civil wars. Not many works of enduring worth were written during the period of the French Revolution, and the last decades of the sixteenth century were scarcely more tranquil. With intervals of uneasy truce, wars, waged in the name of religion but having politics and thirst for power as their underlying causes, ravaged the land for thirty years and more. When the assassination of his predecessor and his own conversion to Catholicism brought Henry of Navarre to the throne as Henry IV, his own position was precarious and that of the country deplorable. Disorder was widespread and much of the land over which he nominally ruled had fallen into the hands of great nobles who sought to set themselves up as independent monarchs. Some he beat in battle, some he bought off, while others rallied to his side. After months of effort he recaptured Amiens from the Spaniards who, ostensibly championing the cause of Roman Catholicism, were really fishing in troubled waters and, to change the metaphor, fanning the flames of civil war. At length in 1598 the Peace of Vervins put an end to the conflict with Spain and in the same year the celebrated Edict of Nantes brought the internal strife to a close and gave to the Huguenots, within certain limits, the religious toleration for which they yearned. Thus France, having at last peace within and without her borders, could begin the work of reconstruction.

This process took various forms. Brigandage carried on by homeless men and disbanded soldiery was gradually suppressed. With the disappearance of marauders and the greater safety of roads, peasants emerged from woods and caves where they had taken refuge and returned to their farms. Agriculture began to revive, methods of cultivation to be improved—one of the notable books of the day was the *Théâtre de l'Agriculture* of Olivier de Serres. Taxation was reduced and industries fostered, particularly the production of silk at Lyons. The volume of trade began to increase and goods flowed more smoothly thanks to the improved state of the roads, to the organization of a regular system of coaches<sup>1</sup> for conveying both travellers and merchandise and to the gradual development of what was later to become an intricate network of canals. As a result of these measures following on the restoration of peace, the middle class had the opportunity to prosper and it is significant that, although La Rochefoucauld, Mme de Sévigné, and Saint-Simon belonged to the nobility, some of the greatest writers of the age—Pascal, Molière, Boileau, La Fontaine, Racine, and Corneille himself—came from the professional and commercial classes. It is also noteworthy that, just as Henry IV, with the assistance of his indefatigable minister, Sully, did much to bring discipline and order to his country, so are these two qualities to be found prominently in the literature of the seventeenth century.

<sup>1</sup> Ever since 1580 a lady of the name of Fontaine had provided a service of coaches connecting Paris with the chief provincial towns. These vehicles drawn by four horses worked to a regular time-table covering 14 leagues a day in summer and 10 in winter. They were licensed to carry 10 passengers each and linked the capital with 34 towns, the longest run being to Lyons. There were also *messageries* or carrier's carts which conveyed packages as well as passengers, but not mail. Letters were taken all over the country by government couriers, Louis XIII instituting in 1621 the office of Postmaster-General.



The peace so hardly won was liable to be upset so long as some of the great lords, as arrogant and turbulent as their feudal forbears, retained their immense powers. Henry resolved therefore to build up the strength of the monarchy at the expense of the nobles. By bringing to the French Crown his own hereditary kingdom of Navarre he did something to tip the balance in his favour. Gradually, too, he was able to appoint as governors of certain provinces men on whose loyalty he could count. Where it was impossible to oust a great noble without provoking an open breach he could at least install beside him a lieutenant-general of proved reliability. By choosing officials of his own to be independent governors of large towns he further curtailed the powers of the provincial governors, and he saw to it that the presidents of the regional *parlements* should be men devoted to the royal interests.

Thus a start was made with that process of strengthening the authority of the central government, which was to be carried further by Cardinal Richelieu and was to culminate in the absolute rule of Louis XIV, who would govern mainly through ministers of *bourgeois* origin whom he could dismiss at will.

As a logical accompaniment to this flow of power and authority towards the centre, there took place an increase in the actual size and in the political and cultural importance of Paris. Though the capital of the country, it had seldom been in recent years the place of residence of the monarch. Francis I, the contemporary of Henry VIII, had been so constantly on the move from one great château to another, passing from Blois to Amboise and thence to Fontainebleau or Saint-Germain, that the Venetian Ambassador to the French court reported plaintively that he was never allowed to remain in one place for more than a few weeks in succession. The multifarious activities of Henry IV rendered

it difficult for him to settle down permanently in any one place. For all that, he was resolved that Paris should henceforward be the true hub of the strong centralized monarchy he was bent on establishing, and he was equally determined that its beauty should match its importance.

By 1610, in which year Ravallac put an end to the king's life with a knife snatched from the tavern of the 'Three Spoons' in the Rue Saint-Honoré, Henry had left his mark on the capital and set an example for his son, Louis XIII, to follow. The Pont-Neuf, now the oldest bridge to span the Seine in Paris, was completed. Unlike the bridges of earlier times it was not cluttered up with houses, but open and spacious. On a triangular plot of waste land at one end of the Ile de la Cité the Place Dauphine was made, its sides lined with handsome houses of red brick and stone. In the district of Montmartre the great hospital of Saint-Louis was built. On the site of the old Tournelles Palace, demolished by the order of Catherine de Medici after her husband, Henry II, had been accidentally killed there while jousting with an officer of his Scottish Guard, Henry IV began the construction of that splendid square, the Place Royale (now the Place des Vosges) which, until the building of Versailles caused a drift away from the city, was to be one of the most fashionable quarters of Paris. Mme de Sévigné was born in one house in this square and Mme de Sablé spent much of her life in another. In this open space François de Montmorency fought a duel, in defiance of Richelieu's edict against the practice, and paid the penalty for his rashness on the scaffold. It was Henry also who erected the long gallery connecting the old Louvre with the new Tuileries<sup>1</sup> Palace that Catherine de Medici had begun.

<sup>1</sup> The space was originally covered with kilns used by the tile-makers of Paris. Hence the name given to the Palace (destroyed in the Commune riots after the Franco-Prussian War) and to the gardens which still remain.

The next reign saw further additions and embellishments to the capital. Another bridge, called the Pont-Marie from the name of the contractor, was built. A fine avenue, the Cours la Reine, was made. The Ile Saint-Louis, hitherto destitute of buildings, unlike its crowded neighbour the Ile de la Cité, was soon covered with houses. More and more the aspect of the city changed. Wooden houses gave way to structures of brick and stone. Paving was laid or renewed. The capital spread beyond the encircling walls, so that the inner girdle of defensive ramparts became useless and was pulled down, thoroughfares known as *boulevards*, a word of the same origin as bulwark, being constructed in their place. Richelieu's great palace, the Palais Cardinal (now the Palais Royal), was matched by the town houses of the great nobles, the Hôtel de Condé, and the rest. In the year of the first performance of Corneille's *Le Cid* (1636-37), an official survey put the total of streets in Paris as 515 and, as new suburbs sprang up and were incorporated in the capital, the number went on increasing. Many of these streets were mere alleys, but the new ones were wider. The introduction of private coaches, sedan-chairs and cabs for hire,<sup>1</sup> the stream of clumsy carts bringing the produce of the countryside to feed the teeming population of the city—these, and the presence of hundreds of street hawkers, created what we should call a traffic problem. Hence innumerable edicts forbidding the hanging of signs below a given height above the pavement, laying down the number of inches that a shop-front might project into the street, and so forth.

All this has more than a merely picturesque or antiquarian

<sup>1</sup> A certain M. Sauvage had vehicles standing at squares and cross-roads which could be hired by the hour or half-hour. He ran his business from the Hôtel Saint-Fiacre in the Rue Saint-Martin. Hence the name *fiacre* applied to a horse-drawn cab. About 1662 there was also introduced the *carrosse à cinq sous* plying between one quarter of Paris and another and being therefore the ancestor of the modern bus.



interest. The growth in size and beauty of Paris was an indication of its increased importance as the capital of a centralized administration. It became a magnet not only to the fashionably inclined but to those who wanted to make their way in the world. As Paris became more and more the hub and centre, so some, though not all, of the provincial towns lost something of their prosperity and prestige. This change was reflected in literature. Whereas Montaigne, an outstanding figure in the sixteenth century, spent the greater part of his life in Gascony, while Agrippa d'Aubigné, a die-hard Huguenot and grandfather of Mme de Maintenon, had his books published in Poitou, the writers of the seventeenth century lived mainly in Paris. Again, whereas Montaigne, meditating in his secluded retreat, made himself the chief subject of his essays, the authors of the classical age, living in the city, wrote of man in relation to society. Literature became social rather than individual, objective rather than personal. Nor did the change end there. References to nature occur very frequently in seventeenth-century literature. But it was man's moral nature that interested the authors, not the habits of animals or the life of the countryside. There were exceptions to this, of course. La Fontaine very notably: Mme de Sévigné to a lesser degree: certain minor writers also, Cyrano de Bergerac, for example. Still, in the main, discerning descriptions of rural life and scenery figure rarely in the literature of the classical age. The urban note is far more dominant. Indeed, many plays and memoirs of the time make it plain that for polite society Paris was the only place worth living in. Writers of English Restoration Comedy, Etherege and Wycherley, for example, convey the same impression in their plays, and both men, it will be recalled, had spent several years of exile in France, before the accession of Charles II to the throne enabled them to return to these shores.

Churches as well as houses and bridges were built in France during this period. But the fabric of spiritual life as well as of the churches themselves was in need of repair and restoration when the wars of religion came to an end. At least a third of the bishoprics were vacant, many of the country clergy were ignorant and numbers of abbeys and monasteries in the hands of laymen. Some benefices even were held by children. Thus one of the illegitimate sons of Henry IV was elected a bishop at the age of eleven, while Angélique Arnauld was no older when she was made abbess of Port-Royal. This appointment, however, as it turned out, was a successful one, for Port-Royal became, under her guidance and with the help of other devout members of the Arnauld family and their friends, a centre of religious activity, the headquarters in France of the Jansenists. To comment on the doctrines of this sect, on the books and pamphlets written for and against them and on the eventual suppression of the community would be appropriate and essential in considering the works of Racine. But such matters can find no place in this introduction to the writings of Corneille, who was already fifty, with his best work behind him, when there appeared in Pascal's *Lettres Provinciales* one of the finest and earliest examples of modern French prose.

For our present purpose it is sufficient to emphasize that, whereas a sixteenth-century author such as Montaigne tended to separate religion and morality, there was in the classical age a reconciliation of the two in much, though certainly not all, of the most characteristic thought and writing of the time. There was, in short, a genuine religious revival, the first fruits of which were already ripe when Corneille himself reached maturity.

There is space here to mention only a few of the men and women who, in the early years of the century, helped to bring about this revival. One among them, Pierre de

Bérulle, much influenced by the writings of Saint Teresa, introduced into France the Order of the Reformed Carmelites. The beliefs of this group were strongly tinged with mysticism. A practical turn to them was given by François de Sales. Born at Annecy in 1567, he studied, like Bérulle, at the Jesuit College of Clermont in Paris. Later he became Bishop of Geneva from where, as their director of conscience, he sent letters to various people in Paris, including Mme de Chantal, the grandmother of Mme de Sévigné. These letters, revised and lengthened, were published in 1608<sup>1</sup> under the title of the *Introduction à la Vie Dévote*. The book was widely read. Its style revealed the charming personality and lucid intelligence of its author. But its great merit was that, while insisting throughout on a high standard of Christian conduct, it made religion attractive to people who lived, not in seclusion, but in fashionable society.

The Reformed Carmelites were not the only community to establish themselves in France at this time. The Récollets, an Order of reformed Franciscans, already had a footing in Paris as well as in other French towns, and presently spread overseas, being the founders of the church in New France, though they eventually handed over their work in Canada to the Jesuits. Then there was the Order of the Ursulines. They devoted themselves to the education of young girls and, in their turn, developed similar activities in Canada. There were others besides, and a contemporary historian recorded in 1639 that over thirty convents had been erected in Paris during the preceding twenty-five years.

Another establishment of a different kind was the Oratoire, founded by Bérulle to train and educate young men for the priesthood. Even better known was the

<sup>1</sup> Bédier and Hazard give the date as 1609.



seminary opened for the same purpose by Father Olier, the *curé* of Saint-Sulpice. The Jesuits, too, were immensely active. Temporarily banished from France during the religious wars, they resumed and expanded their educational work on their return, though they found formidable rivals in the Jansenists. In addition they devoted much attention to missionary work among the Protestants in France and among the heathen in the New World.

Further evidence of the religious revival was afforded by the publication of numerous lives of saints. But the age also produced saints of its own. Prominent among them was St Vincent de Paul (1576-1660), who was responsible for setting up two important organizations, the Priests of the Missions and the Sisters of Charity. The better to help the country clergy in their work, he founded a society whose members came to be known as Lazarists. These worked among both clergy and laity in the provinces and also as missionaries in foreign countries, penetrating to Tunis and Algiers where St Vincent, captured in his youth by Moorish pirates, had been sold into slavery. One result of the improved training of the clergy and of the awakening in them of a real sense of vocation was a great advance in the standard of preaching. The finest examples of pulpit oratory, those of Bossuet (1627-1704), Bourdaloue (1632-1704), and Massillon (1663-1742) were not heard, as the dates sufficiently indicate, until the latter half of the seventeenth century or even later, but there were men in the earlier decades of the classical age whose sermons combined fervour with artistry and eloquence with zeal.

There was a less admirable side to the religious revival. For one thing, missionary zeal is not always compatible with tolerance. For another, Richelieu was a statesman first and a churchman second. Throughout the period of his ministry, from 1624 to 1642, he had two main objects,

to strengthen the authority of the Crown and to increase the influence of France in Europe.

In pursuit of the first objective he ruthlessly scotched conspiracies hatched by the nobles, many of whom looked on him as an upstart. With the same purpose he took vigorous action against the Huguenots who, in that they formed a state within a state, constituted in the Cardinal's judgment a threat to that national unity under the Crown which he was striving to achieve. Yet, with his second object in view, Richelieu, while quelling the Huguenots at home, assisted the Protestants abroad. He sent money, and later men as well, to help Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden and the leaders of the German principalities who were fighting for political and religious independence against the Emperor and the Catholic League. Richelieu did not live to see the fulfilment of his plans, for he died six years before the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which brought the Thirty Years War to an end and added a great part of Alsace-Lorraine to France. This treaty and the Peace of the Pyrenees, which was negotiated in 1659 by his successor, Cardinal Mazarin, and which extended the French frontiers at the expense of Spain, had in combination the effect of delaying the unification of Germany, weakening the already declining power of Spain and preparing the way for the supremacy of France in Europe under the absolute and highly centralized monarchy of Louis XIV.

In addition to the persecution of the Huguenots as a community, there was also savage treatment of individuals, whether Protestant or Catholic. Remarks which to-day would involve the maker of them in an action for libel or slander could then often be uttered or written with impunity. But let a man make an observation which savoured in the slightest degree of heresy or impiety and he was likely to find himself laid by the heels or even burnt at the

stake. For us Molière's *Tartuffe* is so evidently a sanctimonious humbug that the possibility of this portrait of a hypocrite being taken for a malicious caricature of a genuinely religious man does not exist. Yet it was only after much revision and delay and repeated appeals to the king that Molière was at length permitted to present the play. The opposition to this piece came partly from the members of the *Compagnie du Saint Sacrement*, in which both ecclesiastics and laymen, some extremely influential, were enrolled. It was concerned with the promotion of the Roman Catholic faith. In several ways it did positive good : by charitable work, by launching campaigns against gambling and duelling, by seeing to it that priests resided in their parishes and by missionary enterprise. But the members of this group were also merciless hunters of heretics and, the better to supervise morals, organized a system of espionage and interference with family life. They became in effect a secret society and, as such, incurred the disapproval of public opinion as a whole and of Louis XIV in particular. Consequently the *Compagnie* was dissolved in 1660.

There were, therefore, both good and evil aspects of the religious revival, and the extent and profundity of this revival can be overestimated. Still, the fact remains that respect for religion was a marked characteristic of the classical age, and many were the works of art and literature that owed their inspiration to it. There were sceptics, of course, but among the minor rather than the more important writers. La Rochefoucauld, it is true, may be deemed at heart an agnostic, but he paid at least lip service to religion, while for such a man as Bossuet the history of the world could be explained only by the direct interventions of Providence in the affairs of men.

But changes at this time were not confined to social, political, and religious matters. There were reforms in

style and language as well and these naturally exercised a direct influence on literature.

In 1605, the year before the birth of Corneille, François de Malherbe, then a man of fifty, came to settle in Paris. A few of his poems, and, in particular, the verses of consolation that he wrote to a certain M. du Périer on the death of his daughter find a place in any representative anthology. But his output was comparatively small and his influence as a literary critic and law-giver proportionately much greater. Yet he wrote no formal treatise and his theories on poetry can be deduced not so much from his own work as from the shrewd, terse, and discourteous comments that he scribbled on almost every page of a volume of poems by Philippe Desportes, one of the principal successors to Ronsard and his school. A familiar anecdote relates that Malherbe, dining with Desportes, was invited by the latter to look at a copy of a new edition of his translation of the Psalms : whereupon the critic gruffly told him not to bother as he had already seen his ' Psalms ' and they were not so good as his soup. Malherbe may have been a boor, but his rudeness was not gratuitous, nor was it due to envy. It was the outcome rather of his own deep-rooted conviction that there was something fundamentally amiss with the kind of poetry written by his host and others like him.

In Malherbe's opinion, to rely on poetic inspiration was not enough. Indeed there was danger in doing so, since inspiration is fitful and makes for unevenness, whilst surrender to it may lull the faculty of self-criticism and lead to errors of taste and to poor craftsmanship. He regarded precision and clarity as the supreme merits of writing, whether in prose or verse, and went so far as to assert that rhythm, rhyme, and metre alone distinguished poetry from prose. He gave, in short, little or no credit to lyrical impulse and judged by reason not imagination, by intellect not emotion.

Undoubtedly his views on poetry were at once too rigid and too pedestrian, but he had some justification for holding them, since so much writing in the previous age had been marred by carelessness and obscurity. The swirling sentences of Rabelais had sometimes cloaked instead of revealing his meaning, while the verbal conceits, elaborate metaphors, and vague allusions to be found in some sixteenth-century verse were like frills and draperies hiding a statue's purity of outline. So Malherbe sought to abolish nearly all the metrical inventions of Ronsard and his fellows and would have none of the picturesque, archaic, technical or provincial expressions with which they had decked their verse. Words were the tools of a poet, and they ought, Malherbe argued, to be sharp, serviceable, and clean. Moreover, it took skill to handle them. Poems were not trifles to be composed lightly by a casual amateur. They were works of art demanding constant striving and all the resources of a trained intellect. By this ruthless pruning of vocabulary, by reducing the number of metres, by insisting on the need for care and revision, by approaching poetry through reason rather than imagination, Malherbe was making it hard for lyric poetry to flourish. But he was indirectly paving the way for the writing of those dramas in which the poetic impulse found its finest and most memorable outlet.

Malherbe did not fully attain his object, for Boileau, sixty years later, was railing against variations of the very faults that his predecessor had condemned. Nor would Malherbe have achieved what measure of success he did had the tide of opinion not already begun to flow in the direction to which he was pointing. Order, discipline, and clarity were, so to speak, in the air, and the critic was only urging the extension to literature of principles that were being increasingly applied in the social and political spheres. Moreover, even in literature the reaction had

begun, since Desportes was one of the few survivors of a group whose voices had for the most part been drowned by the discordant clamour of the religious wars.

A few hours before his death Malherbe is supposed to have rebuked his nurse for using a word of which he disapproved. Whether the tale is true or not, there was no doubt that this *tyran de mots et de syllabes*, as a friend called him, strove manfully to promote a greater regard for accuracy and clearness in the choice and use of words. Malherbe laboured alone, but his work was soon to be taken up in a more systematic and authoritative manner.

In 1629, the year after the critic's death, nine friends, who were interested in literature and dabbled in writing verse, formed the agreeable habit of meeting informally once a week in the house of one of their number, Conrart. On these occasions they discussed the latest books and criticized each other's literary efforts to their mutual enjoyment and benefit. Anxious to preserve their pleasant intimacy, they purposely refrained from mentioning their meetings to others. After five years, however, one of their number, Malleville, brought a friend, Faret by name, to one of these gatherings. The latter was so much taken with the kindly yet discriminating criticism, which the reading of passages from his own work evoked, that he sang the praises of the group to Boisrobert, who passed on the information to his master, Richelieu.

The Cardinal was greatly interested. His own French style was good and he was eager to extend the influence of France culturally as well as politically. But, if French were to become a first-rate medium for literary expression, its grammar and syntax must be clearly defined. Men whose love of literature had brought them together once a week for five years seemed to the Cardinal admirably fitted to carry out the project he had in mind. Such a group of individuals might frame laws, but they could not ensure



their acceptance. The rules would only command respect if they were issued by a properly constituted body, backed by the authority and prestige of the Cardinal himself. To their consternation, therefore, the group of friends received an invitation from the Cardinal to become an official society under his protection. The invitation, being in fact a command, had to be gratefully accepted. Thus it was that, after some months of preliminary work, the *Académie Française* received its letters patent in January 1635.

Suppressed in 1793, largely because it was a monarchical institution, it was restored ten years later as one of the five constituent bodies of the *Institut*<sup>1</sup> and still retains, substantially unchanged, its original functions and organization. The membership was fixed at 40, a figure first attained in 1639. The French, a nation of individualists, are fond of attacking their own institutions, and during its long existence the *Académie* has come in for its fair share of abuse. Its detractors have pointed out that while some comparatively undistinguished men were admitted, writers such as Pascal, Molière, Baudelaire and Alexandre Dumas were not chosen. It is only fair to mention, however, that Pascal was a Jansenist, Molière an actor and therefore unacceptable to society and the Church, Baudelaire a man of dissolute habits and Dumas something of a mountebank. All four, therefore, were somewhat suspect from the point of view of an official body, which is concerned not merely with its own dignity but with maintaining that of the profession of letters. Moreover, although the majority of famous writers did gain admittance, it is important to remember that the Academy has never pretended to be an assembly of men of genius, nor an exclusive literary club. Ambassadors, noblemen, ecclesiastics, and

<sup>1</sup> The other four are the Academies of (i) Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, (ii) Sciences, (iii) Beaux-Arts, (iv) Sciences morales et politiques.

philosophers have found a place in it alongside novelists, poets and playwrights.<sup>1</sup>

This establishment of the Academy on a fairly broad basis was wise, for the members were called upon to compile a dictionary and a grammar of the French language, a task for which men of general culture as well as specialists in particular fields were needed. Even so, progress was slow. Although individual members did from time to time produce works on the structure and laws of the language, the official grammar sponsored by the Academy appeared only in 1932!

The dictionary, an even more formidable undertaking, was the most constant preoccupation of the early Academicians, and their successors have been continually engaged in revising and bringing it up to date. The first edition was not completed until 1694 and would probably have taken longer still, had not the Minister, Colbert, instituted a system of tokens. One of these was given to each member attending a sitting and he could afterwards cash it for thirty-two sous, a small but not unwelcome sum in an age when it was extremely difficult for a writer to earn a living solely by the practice of his profession.

We hear much in these days about the liberty of the press. In Richelieu's time the newspaper was virtually non-existent and the dubious art of propaganda undeveloped. Books, it was true, could be condemned and burnt, but the Cardinal, though ruthless in repressing disorder, did not go to the length of imposing a rigid censorship of publications, a device which would in any case have proved none too effective. Still, being a person of absolutist tendencies, he doubtless saw in the Academy he

<sup>1</sup> In 1932, for example, the year in which the 'Grammar' appeared. Bergson, a philosopher, Marshal Pétain, a soldier, Cambon, a diplomat, and Poincaré, a statesman, were fellow members of the French Academy with professional writers such as Paul Valéry, a poet, Henry Bordeaux, a novelist, and Eugène Brieux, a playwright.

had set up an instrument for organizing and centralizing literature. It might also be a means of discouraging works which ran counter to his tastes by their style or to his ministerial policy by their content. In this latter respect he found much to displease him in Corneille's *Le Cid* and he accordingly instructed the Academicians to examine and report on it. Their findings, which will be considered on a later page, did not satisfy the Cardinal, and this not altogether happy attempt to turn the Academy into a kind of literary tribunal was not renewed.

Inevitably the attitude of the Academy tends to be conservative, since a man is usually set in his ways and outlook by the time he comes to be elected. One may deprecate the lobbying and intrigue which are apt to take place when a vacancy is to be filled. But such activities, though regrettable in themselves, are a tribute to the high position that the Academy holds, even though the brilliant 'rebel' may not find a place in it, and the Academy itself may be behind rather than in the van of literary movements.

Congreve, it may be recalled, astounded Voltaire by begging his visitor to look on him merely as a private gentleman who happened to beguile his leisure by writing plays. The French view, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was that to write well was a task involving unremitting care and effort. The existence of the Academy was a recognition not only of the dignity but of the exacting nature of a literary career and the very fact that it was an official body lent weight to its pronouncements. Moreover, its setting up for the express purposes of fixing the laws of the language, appraising the suitability and defining the meaning of words was a sign of the times, yet another indication of that regard for order, restraint, and precision which distinguished the literature of the age.

Malherbe, in his bluff way, had invoked popular usage as

the standard by which to gauge correctness in matters of language. The Savoyard grammarian, Vaugelas, in some observations on the French tongue published in 1647, agreed that usage was the proper test. But he ruled out the common people as arbiters and substituted the *élite* or, as he put it, *la plus saine partie de la Cour*. By this he meant the women as well as the men of the Court, and included those other people who, as a result of social contact with frequenters of the Court, came to share the outlook and manners of polite society.

This emphasis on women and politeness is significant. As has already been pointed out, much of the literature of the time was concerned with man as a member of society ; or, more exactly, with man as a member of polite society. Now the politeness of society was due in great measure to the influence of women, and it was the portrayal and analysis of the emotions inspired or experienced by women that constituted one of the main themes of contemporary literature. Further, since these women belonged to the limited circle of fashionable society, and since the literature of the day was the product rather of reason and observation than of imagination, it follows that society was depicted with some accuracy in the writings of the classical age. In other words, while the hero of a tragedy by Corneille, set in ancient Rome, may be a character in his own right, he also has, though speaking in Alexandrine verse, a good deal in common with the seventeenth-century social type, known as the *honnête homme*.

This figure was, at first, a product of the *salons* rather than of the Court. He was a polite person and the Court of Henry IV at the beginning of the century was far from polite, frequented as it was by soldiers who spoke the language of the camp or battlefield, not of the drawing-room.

This lack of refinement proved distasteful to various

people, particularly to Catherine de Vivonne who, prior to her marriage—at the tender age of twelve—to Charles d'Angennes, eldest son of the Marquis de Rambouillet, had spent her childhood in Rome, where her father, the Marquis de Pisani, had been French Ambassador. For some years she duly attended functions at Henry's court, but appeared less and less frequently as time went on until at length the birth of her daughter, Julie, in 1607, gave her an excuse for withdrawing altogether. Instead, she took to receiving her friends in her house<sup>1</sup> in the Rue Saint-Thomas du Louvre. She made substantial alterations to the building, replacing some of the large formal apartments in it by a series of intimate, intercommunicable rooms, and using other colours than the customary red or brown for their decoration. Her own room, where, according to the fashion of that day, she received her guests, sitting fully dressed on her bed, was hung with blue velvet—hence the name of the *chambre bleue* by which it came to be known among the frequenters of the salon. The most favoured of the visitors occupied the spaces between the bed and the walls and these were known as *ruelles*. At a later date Mme de Rambouillet—her husband succeeded to the title in 1611—had her bed placed in a recess or alcove, hence the term *alcoviste* so freely applied in the talk and memoirs of the time to an *habitué* at such receptions.

The twenty years or so from 1620 onwards marked the heyday of the salon. During these years its influence on taste, society, and literature was evident and as yet untainted by the affectation which later showed itself and which was to infect other salons, that of Mlle de Scudéry, for instance, more gravely. At the beginning of this period Mme de Rambouillet was still comparatively young. She

<sup>1</sup> This was almost opposite to the Palais Cardinal (now the Palais Royal). The site is occupied to-day by the Grands Magasins du Louvre.

had charm, delicacy, and tact, qualities essential to a good hostess. She could listen as well as talk and knew how to set and maintain the polite tone of her salon without domination. The *chambre bleue* had no political significance, nor, although men and women met freely there, did any breath of scandal sully its reputation. It was remarkable as being one of the few places where both the aristocrat and the cultured *bourgeois* could converse on more or less equal terms not only with one another, but with ladies of fashion.

Richelieu himself went to the *chambre bleue* on occasion, his niece, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon more often. To the younger generation, that of Mme de Rambouillet's daughter, Julie d'Angennes, belonged such prominent people as 'the great' Condé and his sister, the Duchesse de Longueville, the Comte de Guiche, who became a Marshal of France in 1641, and the Duc de La Rochefoucauld. The habitués drawn from the middle class included many of the early Academicians, Conrart, Vaugelas, and Chapelain. Godeau, the Bishop of Grasse in Provence kept in touch by correspondence, as did J. G. de Balzac, whose lengthy letters to Chapelain and other friends were read aloud and earned him a considerable reputation. Then there was Vincent Voiture, the son of a wine-merchant at Amiens. Though he published nothing in his lifetime, he was a ready versifier, a man of wit, and one of the most constant visitors to the salon and a leading spirit in its activities.

The *chambre bleue* was, of course, no formal assembly such as the Academy. People were drawn to it by the personality of the hostess, by the pleasure they derived from social intercourse in an atmosphere of good manners and refinement, and by the excellence of the conversation. In the modern world the art of conversation has largely vanished. In a salon, frequented in the main by people of

leisure, it flourished. Intellectual conversation was encouraged, and, even when the theme was trivial, it could be discussed in phrases that were witty, succinct, or well-turned. This concern for style was typical of the literature of the time, and the frequenters of the salon, like the Academicians themselves, often argued over the merits and fitness of particular words and over pronunciation. Poems and other works were read aloud by their authors, and criticized. Plays too were read or acted and gradually the link between society and literature was strengthened.

One of the books that aroused great enthusiasm was Honoré d'Urfé's lengthy pastoral romance, *L'Astrée*. Its publication in successive parts was spread over twenty years and the book records, with interludes in the shape of adventurous episodes and gallant or humorous verses, the protracted wooing of the heroine by the 'perfect lover' Céladon. Although the modern reader would find this romance unbearably tedious, it appealed strongly to a person as robust as Henry IV—otherwise he would hardly have asked to have it read to him when he was suffering from gout! The book was perfectly adapted to the purpose of Mme de Rambouillet and to the tastes of her *alcovistes*. She was anxious to make the tone of society decent, to purify the relations between the two sexes. *L'Astrée*, with its lofty moral sentiments, its refinement and, especially, its placing of women on a pedestal, was a powerful and welcome ally to her. The chief topic of the book was love, and in its many pages this emotion was examined, discussed, and analysed with penetration, subtlety and the most constant regard for delicacy. In much the same way was this enthralling subject discussed and examined in the salon itself. There refinement in social intercourse as in conversation was demanded. Gradually this refinement spread to literature itself, because in the salon and in society a social code was evolved, that respect



for *les bienséances*—for what is seemly—required of the *bonnête homme*. Mme de Rambouillet's *salon* admittedly contained seeds of affectation and preciosity. That these grew in later years and in other salons (thereby providing material for Molière's comedies and Boileau's satires) was no fault of hers. She did much to foster delicacy of thought and decency of expression, and she was certainly instrumental in gaining for women an influence in society far greater than they had previously exerted.

In the foregoing pages attention has been drawn to certain factors which affected life in seventeenth-century France and, consequently, the literature reflecting it. But it is as well to recall that, although in any age certain tendencies may be predominant, there are likely to be others that conflict with them. These may show themselves from time to time or, at least, though driven underground, continue to exist. Thus, while it is true that Henry IV began to restore order, a process continued by Richelieu, it is also true that the Cardinal was called to power in order to repress the outbreaks that followed on Henry's death. His ministry was marked by recurring plots and conspiracies, which led during the minority of Louis XIV, under his successor Mazarin, to civil war. The religious revival, though genuine enough, did not cause indifference, blasphemy, and impiety to vanish from the land. A person so highly placed as Mme de Montespan had recourse to witchcraft and the 'black mass' in an endeavour to retain her loosening hold on the affection of Louis XIV. The Edict of Nantes itself, by which Henry IV had succeeded in making terms between Catholic and Huguenot, was revoked by his grandson in 1685. Society and literature were polite, but many people of fashion led scandalous lives, as memoirs reveal, and minor writers produced much scurrilous work. Further, pattern of elegance though he was, Louis XIV, who rose and went

to bed with elaborate ceremony, very rarely had a bath and only washed in the most perfunctory manner.

Still, while neither these things, nor the abject poverty and ignorance of many of the peasantry must be forgotten, the literature of the classical age in general was profoundly affected by the social, religious, literary, and intellectual influences already described. Most of these, it can readily be shown, have a bearing on the particular case of Pierre Corneille.

He was, for example, typical of many writers of the day in that he was a provincial of the middle class who won fame in the capital. Though he was no man of fashion, the polite world of the time was represented in his work, for he made modish quarters of Paris the scene of one or two of his early plays, and he put into the mouths of some of his characters lines that might well have fallen from the lips of an habitu   of the salons. He made his bow, none too gracefully one suspects, in the *chambre bleue*, and the play (*Polyeucte*) that he read there provided convincing evidence of the sincerity of his religious faith. He probably read *L'Astr  e*. He was almost certainly familiar with the heroic romances of La Calpren  de. There were duels and conspiracies in Paris. There are duels and conspiracies in his plays. Descartes' *Discours de la M  thode* appeared within a few months of Corneille's play *Le Cid*. For this reason the influence of the philosopher on the playwright cannot have been direct, but both men were at one in emphasizing the supremacy of will and reason over emotion and imagination. Corneille, too, was an Academician.

In short, while possessing, as any creative artist must, his own distinctive gifts, Corneille was a man of the age in which he lived. He fits in to the contemporary background. It was, however, in the particular setting of the theatre that he achieved distinction. Consequently, we must next consider the condition of the stage when he

began to write his plays, and the theatrical conventions of the time.

## 2. THE THEATRICAL BACKGROUND

Shakespeare and his contemporaries owed something to the popular drama of the Middle Ages. They inherited, for example, the determination of the medieval playwright not to be hedged in by rigid limitations of time and place. In France, on the other hand, there was a marked tendency on the part of dramatists in the sixteenth and subsequent centuries to discard the heritage of earlier times. The break, it is true, was not absolutely complete. 'Miracle' plays, which dealt with the merciful intervention of the Virgin in the affairs of men, almost disappeared, but performances of 'mysteries' continued long after the close of the Middle Ages. These depicted incidents from the Old or New Testaments or from the lives of the saints. Many of them were combined together to make more or less formal cycles illustrating the history of the world from the creation of Adam to the resurrection of Christ. Such productions were enormously long. *Le Mystère des Actes des Apôtres*, for instance, which was written by the brothers Gréban and presented at Bourges (1536) and in Paris (1541), contained close on 62,000 verses. Such works were normally beyond the resources of any one group of actors and, very often, a number of trade guilds or corporations combined to stage them, a favourite day being the feast of Corpus Christi (the Thursday after Trinity Sunday) which had been established by the Council of Vienne in 1311 as a great festival of the Church. It was a far cry from the simple paraphrases of the Gospel narrative given in churches for the instruction of an unlettered congregation to these unwieldy and far more secular

productions which might last for many hours and call for the participation of some hundreds of people.

A piece that set out to portray, however sketchily, a long period in the history of mankind required many changes of scene. To make this possible one or other of two distinct methods was adopted. One device consisted of using a cart, and setting up on poles above it a platform which served as a stage. The space between this and the floor of the cart was curtained in and provided a dressing-room from which the players mounted by a ladder to reach the stage. The scene over, the cart would be driven away to repeat the performance at a second 'station,' its place being taken by another 'mobile theatre' which moved on in its turn to be replaced by a third, and so on. When a fixed stage of reasonable width was available, the method employed was that of the *décor simultané*, or 'standing scene.' Under this system the painted backcloth, instead of depicting one scene, was divided into sections or 'mansions,' each representing in summary or conventional fashion one of the places in which part of the action of the play was laid. The actors would stand for a moment in front of one of these to indicate to the audience that the scene of this particular portion of the play was meant to be, say, Hell, the Garden of Eden, Herod's Palace, or Heaven. Then they were free to move about the stage until the close of the scene, at which point they would group themselves in front of the adjoining 'mansion' to show that the action was about to shift to a fresh locality.

This latter method was the one used by the *Confrérie de la Passion*, an organization which in 1402 obtained from Charles VI the sole right to perform 'mystery' plays in the Paris region. For a century and a half this was a profitable monopoly. But the buffoonery and broad humour that had crept into these plays was displeasing to

the ecclesiastical authorities. Moreover, as the Reformation began to gain ground, the fear grew that these plays might be made a vehicle of Calvinist or Protestant propaganda. In 1548, therefore, their performance was forbidden. This ban was not wholly effective, especially in the provinces where 'mystery' plays were acted now and then under different titles until well on into the seventeenth century. Officially, however, they vanished from the boards and religious drama did not reappear in the public theatres of the capital until the production of Corneille's tragedy *Polyeucte* in 1642.

To some extent the mystery plays were replaced by "moralities." In these the majority of the characters were allegorical figures, embodied virtues and vices. Despite their didactic nature these pieces allowed the medieval playwright somewhat greater scope in devising his plots and creating his characters than was possible in plays where the protagonists were well-known Biblical characters and the events drawn from the Scriptures or from familiar legends. This fondness for elaborate allegory was characteristic of the time. To modern tastes it is apt to be tedious, and even medieval audiences may have found it tiresome. At all events comic relief, often of a rough-and-ready kind, was introduced into both mysteries and moralities. These comic interludes were presently detached from the longer plays and acted separately, from which it was but a step to writing comedies that had little to do with religious or didactic drama. Of such were the *soties*, acted frequently by a group called the *Enfants-sans-souci*. Allegory was present even in these, but in the main they were concerned with attacking by caricature and satire contemporary events and institutions. The farces which developed from the interludes interpolated into the mysteries had less satirical purpose. They were comedies of intrigue and even, in a primitive fashion, comedies of

manners. One or two of them, at least, are of the stuff of eternal comedy. This is certainly true of the anonymous *Maître Pathelin*, in which a rascally lawyer having cheated a shopkeeper, is himself fooled by a peasant whose acquittal on a charge of sheep-stealing he has triumphantly secured.

One way and another, therefore, there was in the mid-sixteenth century, despite the ban on mystery plays, a large and varied mass of drama, on which Ronsard and his colleagues might have built when they set about their task of furthering French literature in all its branches. Instead, in the realm of drama as in that of lyric or epic poetry, they did their best to ignore the Middle Ages and sought their inspiration and their models in the works of Greek and Roman authors.

In so turning their backs on the popular drama of their day Ronsard and his friends were true to their literary convictions. The boisterous farces, the sprawling great works in which the grave, the edifying, the naïve, and the coarse rubbed shoulders with one another made no appeal to men drunk with the beauties of classical literature. Enthusiastically they translated the plays of Euripides and Sophocles. But in their own original work they tended to model themselves on the plays of Seneca. This may have been because, well educated though they were, they were better acquainted with Latin than with Greek. But it may also have been for the reason that some of Seneca's works, though cast in the form of dramas, were primarily exercises in rhetoric, better adapted for reading or recitation than for presentation on the stage. By disdaining—as was understandable—the contemporary drama, the poets of the Pléiade shut the theatre door in their own faces. Neither the *Confrérie de la Passion*, nor the *Enfants-sans-souci* would have agreed to stage the kind of plays they had in mind, and the only professional actors of the day were

strolling players who would not have made head or tail of them. A play does not come to life until it is acted, and its dramatic qualities can only be adequately tested when it is presented before a discerning but varied public. It may be said with justice that no such discriminating audience existed at the time. On the other hand dramas of universal appeal can scarcely come into being when plays are written, acted, and witnessed by a small coterie of like-minded people.

It was in just these conditions that the first French classical tragedy, Jodelle's *Cléopâtre* was presented by the author and his friends in 1553 at the Court of Henry II. The same writer's comedy *Eugène*, a satire on the clergy, was produced in similar circumstances. He followed it with *Didon*, a play written throughout in Alexandrines, the twelve-syllable line that was to be the characteristic metre of the classical age and which was probably so-called because a primitive form of it had been used in a medieval epic poem, *Le Roman d'Alexandre*.

Their choice of a model, coupled with the fact that the plays written by the Renaissance poets and their successors were usually presented by amateurs in college halls or noblemen's houses, and sometimes not performed at all, rendered their work academic and of limited appeal. Even when the subject was taken from sacred history like Garnier's *Les Juives* (1583) or from recent history like Montchrétien's *L'Écossaise* (1605), a tragedy on the subject of Mary Queen of Scots, the same theatrically ineffective form and technique were used. Garnier's verse, certainly, was impressive and dignified. His work had literary, if not truly dramatic qualities, and but for him classical drama in France might not have developed. But neither he nor his fellows had much idea of what constituted "good theatre," far less indeed than the writers of some of the popular farces and interludes. The academic playwright



neglected to bring his protagonists face to face, with the result that dramatic situations had no chance to develop. Frequently what meagre action a play contained was brought to a halt by long-winded speeches. In *Hippolyte*, for example, a tragedy on the same theme as Racine's *Phèdre*, the hero's death which, in accordance with the classical convention, occurs 'off-stage,' is reported in a speech of no fewer than 170 lines. The Inquisitor's speech in Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* is lengthy, but it holds the attention because it is compact of argument and the spectators who are, as it were, present in the court-room, know what it may mean to Joan. A speech of similar length describing her burning would pall before it was half through, yet it was precisely this mistake that Jodelle and his successors so frequently made. There was, in short, a crying need of someone with a practical knowledge of stagecraft who could attract people of some taste and education to the theatre without driving away the unlettered. Fortunately such a playwright was forthcoming in the person of Alexandre Hardy (1570-1632), who was a man of the commercial playhouse, not of the academic theatre.

The ban imposed in 1548 on the performance of mystery plays was a severe blow to the *Confrérie de la Passion*, since it was this type of piece that was usually given at the brotherhood's theatre, the *Hôtel de Bourgogne*, the only authorized playhouse in Paris. The *Confrérie*, however, was not driven out of business altogether, for it put forward and made good its claim to hold the monopoly in the capital of every kind of theatrical performance and not merely of the now forbidden 'mysteries.' It was able therefore to levy toll on any company that ventured to stage plays in Paris, and it prosecuted all those who tried to break this stranglehold on theatrical enterprise. Growing weary of paying dues or of being fined for their failure to do so, many theatrical companies undertook provincial

tours. As things turned out, the severity of the *Confrérie* proved of benefit to the drama for, had conditions in Paris not compelled the actor Montdory to give performances in Rouen in 1629, Corneille's first play, which was then brought to his notice, might never have been staged and, but for this encouragement, the later and greater plays not written.

This, admittedly, is speculation. The fact remains that, although the *Confrérie* enriched itself at the expense of the professional players, it could not, following the ban, make much use of its own theatre, since it had specialized in the production of the forbidden 'mysteries.' Therefore, while jealously clinging to its rights, it leased the *Hôtel de Bourgogne* to various companies of its own choosing.

In 1599 the theatre was let to a certain Valleran Lecomte who, for more than thirty years, employed Alexandre Hardy as a writer and adapter of plays. Like Lope de Vega, Hardy was a prolific writer. Some forty of his pieces were printed, but his total output is reckoned at anything between 500 and 800 plays, for which he usually received an outright payment of fifty crowns apiece. Work written at such a pace could not have much literary quality, but Hardy possessed what the academic playwrights so notably lacked, a sense of the theatre. In such pieces as his tragedy, *Mariamne*, in which Salome was portrayed as a kind of female Iago, he brought vivid characters and strong situations on to the stage. His personages confronted one another and his plots were well constructed.

Despite his skill, however, tragedy proved too austere for most of the patrons of the *Hôtel de Bourgogne* and Hardy therefore turned to tragi-comedy. Garnier had shown himself a pioneer in this type of play with his *Bradamante*. As developed by Hardy it came to resemble melodrama and differed in many respects from tragedy. It had a happy ending. The scene shifted from one place to

another, and the subject, when not original, was usually taken from a medieval epic or a contemporary novel. The hero and heroine were not necessarily of exalted stock and the characters as a rule were of no great interest. Incident, on the other hand, was varied and plentiful, Hardy introducing freely elopements, disguises, duels, timely reappearances of supposedly long dead relatives, and many other characteristic features of Italian or Spanish tales and comedies of intrigue and adventure, which have long since become stale and threadbare from constant repetition.

Other writers, employing much the same methods, lacked Hardy's verve, but had a more polished style. Among these may be mentioned Théophile de Viau, author of the tragi-comedy *Pyrame et Thisbé* (1617) (a theme which, it will be remembered, had previously appealed to those notable performers Bottom, Quince, Snug, Flute, and Starveling). Then there were the pastoral plays, of which Racan's *Les Bergeries* (1618) and Mairet's *Sylvie* (1626) were outstanding examples, showing something of both the insipidity and the charm of their prose counterpart, *L'Astrée*. In comparison with what was to come later, none of these plays can be said to have any lasting worth. For all that, Hardy by his ability to handle a plot, and other writers by their superior style, contrived to attract to the theatre men and women who would, on the one hand, have fought shy of crude farces, or, on the other, have been bored to tears by the tragedies of Jodelle and Garnier. These playwrights of the early seventeenth century performed, then, an essential service. Richelieu's influence and interest in the theatre must also have helped to raise its prestige, and it is an indication of the enhanced reputation of the stage that, about the year 1625, authors began to allow their names to appear on play-bills. In 1622, moreover, Valleran Lecomte and his company left the capital to go on tour, taking Hardy and his facile pen

with them, so that other authors had greater opportunities than before to furnish theatrical fare. Hardy returned in 1628, but the next year the monopoly enjoyed by the *Confrérie* came to an end. As a result Montdory was able to establish himself in Paris, settling down, after a brief sojourn in the Impasse Beaubourg and the Rue Michel-le-Comte, in the Rue Vieille du Temple, not far from the fashionable Place Royale. Thus, leaving out of account the Italian actors who paid periodical visits to France and the players at the fairs, of which there was nearly always one in progress somewhere in the capital, Parisians henceforward had a choice of at least two public playhouses, Montdory's *Théâtre du Marais* and the old *Hôtel de Bourgogne*, which was so called because it stood on a site in the Rue Mauconseil originally occupied by a mansion belonging to the Duke of Burgundy.

There are many instances in theatrical history of plays, good in themselves, failing to achieve success because they were poorly acted or badly produced. It is likewise true that the size of a theatre may affect the fortunes of a play for good or ill. An intimate comedy may well prove ineffective in a vast theatre, while a piece depending on spectacular effect can scarcely be shown to advantage on a small stage. This last consideration was perhaps of less importance in the old days when nearly all theatres were of modest size. Nevertheless, at all times, the fate of plays and even the form of plays have been governed to some extent by stage conditions, and we may usefully devote some space, therefore, to considering what these conditions were when Corneille's plays were first performed.

When Montdory returned from Rouen and produced Corneille's *Mélite* in Paris in 1629, he followed the common practice of staging it in a converted tennis-court. Such places, like inn-yards in England, frequently served as playhouses and when, a few years later, Montdory was able

to establish the *Théâtre du Marais*, the interior arrangements were very similar to those made in adapting a *jeu de paume* for use as a theatre.

Like Shakespeare's Globe, the French equivalent was not large, for the actual playing area of a tennis-court measured only 100 feet by 35 or 40. The stage was erected at one end, tiers of seats or benches were put up at the opposite extremity, while two rows of galleries, placed one above the other and divided into boxes, lined the walls, leaving standing room on the floor-space for the French 'groundlings.'

Some time during the fourth decade of the seventeenth century—and very possibly owing to the immense popularity of Corneille's *Le Cid*—additional space for favoured spectators was found by putting chairs on either side of the stage itself. This must have tended to destroy illusion and to hamper the movement of the actors. But they had their living to earn. On first nights—or rather afternoons, since performances were usually over by six o'clock, the streets being dark and none too safe for peaceful citizens after nightfall—the prices of admission were doubled. On other occasions, however, a place in the pit cost only ten sous and musketeers got in for nothing: even a seat in a box sold for twenty sous. Consequently, players who usually shared the profits between them instead of receiving a regular salary, were prepared to endure the presence on the stage of wealthy patrons who were willing to pay half a gold louis for the opportunity of ogling the actresses at close quarters and of showing themselves off to the rest of the house. Women, let it be remembered in passing, appeared professionally on the London stage only from 1660. In Paris they did so at least fifty years before that date.

Even had financial considerations not entered into the matter, prudence would have prevented the players from

protesting against the inconvenient presence of spectators on the stage. They were dependent on the goodwill of the public and on the munificence of patrons for their living. But they also stood in need of influential protection, since both the Law and the Church frowned upon them. Unless he abjured his profession on his deathbed, an actor might be refused Christian burial. Even Molière had an obscure funeral at midnight, and, in 1730, to the intense indignation of Voltaire, the actress Adrienne Lecouvreur was interred without ceremony in a swamp by the banks of the Seine. These, perhaps, were exceptional cases, but they illustrate the insecurity of the actor's position and his consequent need of powerful backing. Some of the strolling players were undoubtedly rough customers, as was only to be expected, since a calling that is suspect in the eyes of Authority does not readily attract reputable people to it. Fortunately, Richelieu, Louis XIII, and Louis XIV, in addition to various other notables, took an interest in the theatre and extended their patronage to the players. This made it easier for them to pursue their profession and helped to raise its status. As a result a better class of actor appeared and this gave rise to a better class of play which, in its turn, brought to the theatre a better class of spectator. Men like Montfleury and Floridor, who were of good birth and education, did not disdain farce, but they were capable, as Gautier-Garguille and Turlupin were not, of portraying personages belonging to polite society.

At the old-established *Hôtel de Bourgogne*, where the players were privileged to call themselves the *Comédiens du Roi* and to print their playbills in red, the method of presentation known as the *décor simultané* long survived. But when the *Marais* was founded, this now obsolete device was beginning to disappear, and at both theatres plays were performed against a background of curtains, parted here

and there to form entrances and exits. Furniture was placed on the stage and sometimes scenery of an unambitious kind. Later in the century, for gala performances at court and for spectacular *pièces à machines*, the setting was more lavish, but it can never have been elaborate in the public theatres. The words *un palais à volonté*—i.e., “any sort of a palace”—are common in contemporary editions of plays and clearly indicate that the scenery and properties were usually simple and unpretentious. This was natural enough. Although plays were frequently revived, long runs were unknown, since the theatre-going public was small. Expenses therefore had to be kept down if there were to be any adequate profits to share out between the players and the author. Moreover, with spectators occupying part of the stage,<sup>1</sup> costly settings and frequent changes of scenery would have been impracticable. Elaborate lighting too was out of the question. Glass chandeliers did, as the century wore on, replace the tin sconces fixed to wooden laths, but candles continued to provide the illumination. The Paris theatres, be it noted, were roofed in, not partly open to the sky like the Elizabethan playhouses. Candles, whether of wax or tallow, were liable to gutter and had to be snuffed every half-hour or so. One is tempted to wonder whether the necessity of lowering the chandeliers for this purpose may not have helped to determine the length of the individual acts in a play, the duration of which remains substantially the same to-day.

Such, in brief, were stage conditions in Corneille's time. It remains to say something of the dramatic rules which the playwright was expected to observe. Chief among these were the famous three ‘unities.’ They were the subject

<sup>1</sup> This practice continued until 1759, when a nobleman, in response to the pleas of Voltaire, paid the actors 12,000 livres, to make up for the loss incurred by doing away with these seats. By that date, of course, theatres were somewhat larger, the *Comédie Française*, constructed in 1687, being capable of holding 1500 to 2000 spectators.



of heated argument and of varying interpretation. In practice, however, their effect was to constrain the playwright to compress the events of his play within the compass of a single day (unity of time), and to make the action pass in the same place in each successive scene or act (unity of place). Further, he must not introduce personages or happenings in any way irrelevant or inessential to the plot (unity of action).

Scholars had been familiar with these rules for many years. Two of them, at least, were mentioned by Aristotle, though subsequent critics, in their worship of classical culture, seem to have read into them rather more than was justifiable. Sir Philip Sidney in England had discussed them, so had Cervantes and Lope de Vega in Spain. Ronsard had mentioned them in a short treatise on the poetic art in 1565. Other writers, Jean de la Taille in 1572 and Vauquelin de La Fresnaye in 1605, had stressed the desirability of limiting the scope of the time, place, and argument of a play. The opposite view was expressed by François Ogier in 1628 in a preface to Schelandre's *Tyr et Sidon*. Alexandre Hardy, a practical man of the theatre, did not concern himself with such matters, but provided in his tragi-comedies the exciting and sometimes improbable incidents that the public liked. The *Hôtel de Bourgogne* possessed a considerable stock of scenery. Reluctance to discard this, as well as natural conservatism, may have strengthened the hostility of the players there to the application of the rules. Montdory, on the other hand, possibly in the hope of putting his rivals out of countenance, welcomed the reforms and was soon staging plays at the *Marais* in conformity with them.

For a while, then, the issue was in doubt. Scudéry alternated between the old method and the new. Chapelain, a sound critic but a mediocre poet, accepted the unities. By 1635 Richelieu was of the same mind.

Corneille's earliest plays did not conform with the unities, for the good reason that he was at that time unaware of their existence. Gradually, however, the scales were tipped in favour of the unities, largely because the whole trend of the age was, as we have seen, in the direction of clarity, discipline, and restraint. In 1631 Jean Mairet (1604-86) defined and advocated the adoption of the unities in the preface to his pastoral tragi-comedy *Silvanire* and, three years later, produced in his *Sophonisbe* a tragedy written in strict accordance with them. Other writers followed suit and one may say that by 1640 it was virtually incumbent on any serious playwright to adhere to the unities.

One argument freely used in support of them was that they helped to increase *vraisemblance* or, in other words, made it easier for the spectator to believe in the reality of the events enacted before him. A temporary, but deliberate, "suspension of disbelief" is part of the contribution that the spectator may fairly be asked to make and, if he is reluctant to make it, a play may well fail in its effect. But if he is to surrender for the time being to the "illusion of reality," too great a strain must not be placed on his credulity. Observance of the unities, it was felt, lessened this strain. An Anglo-Saxon spectator, accustomed to plays ranging far and wide in place and time and, perhaps, to major and minor plots in one and the same piece, might well question the usefulness of the unities. If he is willing to believe that events presented, according to his watch, in two hours, are really spread over a whole day, why should he boggle at the extension of this fictitious time to a period of weeks or months? In like manner, if he is prepared to believe that by walking a few yards he is transported from the town in which he lives to, say, ancient Rome, why should he refuse to admit that in the second act the scene has shifted to, for example, Egypt?

Once the initial improbability is accepted, others of the same kind can surely follow.

In Somerset Maugham's *The Breadwinner* and in J. B. Priestley's *Dangerous Corner*, not only does the scene remain unchanged throughout, but respect for the unity of time is carried so far that the supposed duration of the action is exactly the same as the actual playing time. For all that, though both plays are admirable, neither grows in *vraisemblance* as a result. On the contrary we are a trifle disconcerted at first to find the players at the beginning of the second act in precisely the same positions as they had occupied at the fall of the curtain. They would fain have us believe that there has been no ten-minute interval. We can accept the illusion of the lapse of time on the stage, but not of its standing still in the auditorium.

It is a mistake, however, to consider the unities in the light of modern conditions. In our day changes of scene are readily made acceptable because settings are convincing and realistic. In the seventeenth century they were not. The Elizabethans solved the problem by dispensing with scenery almost entirely and appealing to the imagination of the spectators. In France, on the other hand, the method was different, because it was an age of reason rather than of imagination. Besides, the *décor simultané* would have strained the strongest imagination, and the most co-operative spectator would find it difficult to admit that Rome, Carthage, and a battlefield could all be represented simultaneously on a small stage with no more than a few feet separating one from another. The logical thing, therefore, was to remove the improbability altogether by confining the action of the play to one place.

In like manner, were the events of a play to cover a period of years, the actors would have to grow appreciably older, and this would be incongruous and improbable to spectators who were well aware that only an hour or so

had elapsed since they had entered the playhouse. It was far better, therefore, to reduce the duration of the action to a single day which, while substantially in excess of the real lapse of time, was not glaringly so. Such a compromise would greatly lessen the improbability without rendering the task of the playwright unbearably difficult. In any case, many changes of scene and long lapses of time were relics of the primitive theatre and, as such, better abolished.

With the acceptance of these two unities, the application of the third followed automatically, for surely the greatest improbability of all would have been to make a whole series of events come about in one place within the space of twenty-four hours. The action must necessarily, therefore, be relatively slight and, in order that it might have free play within the limits imposed, it must be shorn of everything that was not logically and artistically essential: hence the absence of sub-plots and incidental characters and the refusal to allow any comic element to find a place in tragedy.

One may perhaps regret the strictness with which these unities were observed. Racine had little difficulty in conforming with them, but Corneille, who was far closer in time and perhaps in taste to Hardy, often chafed under them. It is almost certain, however, that some such development would have come about, even in the absence of such rigid rules. French drama was already moving towards simplicity and order. It was in conformity with the taste of the classical age that the mingling of different *genres* and the accumulation of incident should be discouraged. Thus the dramatist was left free to concern himself with the delineation of character, the analysis of human passions and emotions, and the discussion of moral issues.

### 3. CORNEILLE'S LIFE AND CHARACTER

Christened Pierre, like his father and grandfather, the dramatist was born at Rouen on June 6, 1606, the first child of Pierre Corneille and his wife Marthe, *née* Le Pesant. The father was a lawyer, holding an office under the Crown in the department of *Eaux et Forêts*. He lived in the Rue de la Pie, not far from the church of St Sauveur, of which he was churchwarden, and he also owned a small country estate at Petit-Couronne a few miles from Rouen.

Eventually there can have been little room to spare in either dwelling, for Pierre, the younger, was followed in due time by three sisters, Marie, Marthe, and Madeleine, and by two brothers, Antoine, who grew up to become *curé* of Fréville, and Thomas, born in 1624, who, like his more illustrious brother, was destined to be a playwright. Add to these various uncles and cousins, mostly connected with the law or the church, and we have a fairly clear picture of a sober, united, and well-respected family.

Pierre Corneille, like Descartes, Molière, and Bossuet, received his education at a Jesuit school. It was only in 1603 that the Jesuits, who had been temporarily driven from France during the later stages of the religious wars, were permitted to return and resume their teaching and other work. In their schools Latin was customarily spoken and much importance was attached to the acquisition of a good Latin style. Quite apart from its value as a factor in a liberal education, such knowledge was of direct and practical advantage to Corneille. He was to become a master in the difficult art of writing French verse, and the composition of Latin verses must have been a useful preparation for this work. Moreover, he derived the plots of many of his plays from classical sources which, thanks to his familiarity with Latin, he was able to study in the original. We know nothing of his schooldays, but it is

reasonable to assume that he was grateful for the teaching he received, since many years later he dedicated some verses to one of the Jesuit fathers, in whose class he had been at Rouen.

His schooling over, Corneille went to study law with his uncle François and took his advocate's oath before the Parlement of Rouen when he was eighteen (1624). Tradition has it that he pleaded only once in court and even this may be an over-estimate. Certainly Corneille was no orator. On his own confession he groped for words and spoke indistinctly. His real medium of expression was the written, not the spoken word.

His legal knowledge and training, however, were not wasted. After an interval of four years, during which Corneille seems to have divided his time between study, the company of his friends, the writing of poetry, and one or two rather timid love affairs, his father purchased two posts for him (1628): one as an advocate in his own department, the *Eaux et Forêts*, the other under the Admiralty. Neither can have been very important, since Corneille received only 6000 livres for them when he sold them in 1650. On the other hand, neither, particularly the latter, can have been a sinecure. Rouen at this time was a thriving port, and it was Corneille's business to register the movement of ships, issue clearance papers and arbitrate in cases of dispute between seamen and owners or—and there is record of a specific instance—between pilots and skippers of small craft. These and other duties he carried out faithfully for twenty-two years.

Molière gave up the promise of a successful career as 'royal upholsterer' to go on the stage. Various explanations of his action have been given, the most probable being that he fell head over heels in love with the actress Madeleine Béjart. Corneille was not stage-struck, but it is likely that love, ultimately unrequited, had something

to do with his turning playwright. At all events, he conveyed this impression in some verses published in 1637, long after the event, though one cannot be sure of the depth of his passion or of the identity of its object. A Mlle Courant and a Mlle Milet have been mentioned, with a preference for the latter since her name approximates to *Mélite*, the title of his earliest play. More probably, however, it was one Mlle Hue, who eventually sought security and married a man called Dupont. Anyway, the point is unimportant. What matters is that in 1629, the year after he had acquired his two official posts, Corneille wrote a play and the actor Montdory (1594-1651) agreed to stage it.

Put on in Paris at the *jeu de paume* in the Rue Beaubourg, it achieved some success, chiefly owing to the natural quality of the dialogue, which resembled the conversation of ordinary well-bred people. Corneille had doubtless seen plays at Rouen prior to Montdory's visit, for there were two tennis-courts in his native place that were used as playhouses. But at this date he was not in touch with literary circles in Paris. His natural taste was for refined comedy and critics pointed out that *Mélite* was lacking in incident. Accordingly in his next play, the tragi-comedy *Clitandre* (1632), he more than made good this deficiency, introducing murders, outrages, and escapes, with a heroine blinding her would-be ravisher with a hairpin, an action which checks her victim's ardour, but not his verbosity. Fortunately, Corneille did not pursue this extravagant vein. Still, whatever its defects, this piece with its predecessor had made Corneille known to the theatre-going public. Some Latin verses that he wrote in 1633 when Richelieu accompanied the King and Queen on a visit to Forges were the means of bringing him also to the notice of the Cardinal. As a result Richelieu enrolled him as one of his 'five authors,' the others being Rotrou, Colletet, Boisrobert, and I.'Estoile. One of the duties of this group

was to work up the Cardinal's own dramatic ideas, and Corneille presently found himself entrusted with the task of writing the third act of the *Comédie des Tuileries*. This he is said to have treated in his own fashion instead of following the Cardinal's recommendations and, as a result, parted company with the masterful prelate. This independence did not endear him to Richelieu, but it left Corneille free to go his own way, and, encouraged by Montdory, he found time, in the intervals of his duties, to write four more comedies in quick succession.

The first of these, *La Veuve*, has a plot which, involved in the later stages, begins simply and clearly. It contains a good portrait of a timid lover, some gentle satire of literary mannerisms, and some graceful love-scenes. In his preface to the play Corneille wrote: "Comedy is merely portrayal of our words and actions and the perfection of the portrait depends on its fidelity. In accordance with this maxim I have tried to put into the mouths of my players only those words that people in their position would be likely to use, to make them talk like *bonnêtes gens* and not like authors."

In endeavouring to depict people in this way, Corneille was producing something approaching realistic comedy. He emphasized this note in *La Galerie du Palais*, showing a typically Parisian scene and contemporary manners and customs, which may well have struck him the more forcibly because he was himself a provincial. These realistic touches, which included conversations between shopkeepers whose fellows did in actual fact conduct their business in the *galerie*, contributed little to the development of the plot, but aroused the interest of the spectators. In *La Suivante* (1634) he broke another link with the past by doing away with the traditional 'nurse,' a gross and earthy rôle normally taken by a man, and substituting the soubrette or *demoiselle de compagnie*. It was proper that this



character should be the title-rôle in this particular play, for the piece shows her endeavouring to supplant her new mistress in the affections of her lover, sowing discord and confusion and, as the result of her scheming, bringing about her own unhappiness.

In *La Place Royale* (1635 ?), the action of which is supposed to take place in the fashionable square of that name hard by the *Théâtre du Marais*, the realistic element is less marked. The title was well calculated to appeal to spectators, but it was not particularly apt, since the plot might equally well have been unfolded with some other Parisian square as its setting. For us, at all events, the most interesting feature of the play is the character of Alidor, who foreshadows in some respects the personages of some of Corneille's later and more important plays. Alidor is in love with Angélique, but resolves to crush this emotion which he considers unworthy of an *homme supérieur*. Thus early in Corneille's work we find the characteristic view that love is a passion to be subdued by strength of will. With *Médée* (1635) Corneille turned for the first time to tragedy and achieved, as was to be expected, only partial success, the interest of his piece residing rather in his handling of the grim sequence of events than in his treatment of the central character who was, perhaps inevitably, too monstrous and inhuman to be made sympathetic. In his *Examen* of the play Corneille commented on the problem created by personages whose sole function is to listen to the narration of the play's theme. Since much of the action in classical tragedies took place off stage, it had to be reported, not shown, but when the outline of the plot was familiar to nearly everyone in the audience, the rôle whether of the messenger or of the recipient of his tidings was almost bound to be thankless and led to speeches of mere rhetoric and declamation. But *Médée* did contain also some fine passages of fiery

passion and cogent argument. For the moment, however, Corneille abandoned tragedy and with *L'Illusion Comique* (1636) produced a curious piece of fantasy containing a play within a play, with a magician showing a worried father the varied adventures befalling his missing son. The stock figure of the braggart but craven captain, familiar in Italian comedies and farces, appeared here as boastful and cowardly as ever, but speaking good verse and taking a legitimate place in polite comedy. This element of politeness in Corneille's comedies is worth emphasizing. For the most part, they are not particularly amusing. But they have literary quality and they are not coarse. He raised the level of comedy and paved the way for Molière. His own genius found its proper expression in tragedy, and with the production of *Le Cid* (1636-37) he came into his own.

With the public, the success of this play was immense and instantaneous. Here was a piece in which noble and sympathetic characters were torn between conflicting duties and loyalties, a play with fine speeches, dramatic situations and issues squarely faced. Moreover, given the nature of the principal characters, the events followed one another logically, almost inevitably. Perhaps the spectators did not appreciate the finer points of the play or grasp its significance as a landmark in the history of French drama. But they were captivated by the story of Rodrigue and Chimène as Corneille had unfolded it. Gleefully Montdory wrote to Guez de Balzac on January 18, 1637, to report the outstanding success of the play in which he had created the title rôle.

This success, however, did not long remain undisputed. Most of the playwrights of the day, save for Rotrou, showed themselves bitterly hostile to *Le Cid* and its author. Whereas they had contributed laudatory prefaces to the printed edition of *La Veuve*, they now wrote angry

pamphlets denouncing Corneille as a clumsy craftsman and a plagiarist. Envy, doubtless, was partly responsible for this change of front. The triumph of *Le Cid* had dwarfed their own more modest successes and, overnight, the colleague had become a formidable rival liable to outdo them both in renown and financial reward. In addition to this human but unworthy resentment, some of the critics also felt genuine doubts about the merits of the play. They may have been influenced, too, by Richelieu's dislike of *Le Cid*, for it was not prudent to offend him. The Cardinal's attitude can readily be understood. Corneille had already caused him some annoyance by finding his service uncongenial and withdrawing from it as soon as possible. Now he had put upon the boards a hero who was shown triumphant in two duels, while the Cardinal was doing his utmost to suppress such contests, which made for disorder and cost the country some hundreds of lives each year. More than that, *Le Cid* exalted the Spanish code of honour at the very moment when Spain, at war with France since May 1635, had an invading army on French soil and, indeed, uncomfortably close to Paris.

Corneille, hurt and bewildered, kept silence for a space and then joined the pamphlet warfare. He dealt shrewd and wounding blows at Mairet, Claveret, and Scudéry, who had asserted that his play was not in accordance with the rules and that such merits as it possessed were derived from Castro's *Mocedades del Cid* ("Youthful Exploits of *Le Cid*"), the first part of which had provided Corneille with the bare bones of his plot. Unfortunately Corneille was not an urbane controversialist and he forfeited some sympathy by roundly disclaiming in his *Excuse à Ariste* any debt to his predecessors or contemporaries. The assertion "Je ne dois qu'à moi seul toute ma renommée" was not entirely true and it was certainly tactless. At

length Richelieu stepped into the ring, put a stop to the scuffle and ordered the submission of the play to the judgment of the Academy.

The Academicians did not relish the task. They were at this date (1637) still a recently established body and their findings, whatever the nature of their verdict, were bound to offend one side or the other. Chapelain, who conducted the proceedings and drafted the report, was in an unhappy position, since he had begun by praising *Le Cid* and the Cardinal soon made it clear that he expected a sharp condemnation of it. Consequently several months elapsed and many revisions were made before the *Sentiments de l'Académie* were published. They ran to close on two hundred pages and, while conceding that the play had certain virtues, the report made adverse comments on many passages in the text. It implied, moreover, that the play was undeserving of success since it did not faithfully observe the rules and, in several important respects, flouted morality and good taste, the behaviour of Chimène in surrendering to her love being considered particularly reprehensible.

This severe but still limited condemnation of the play did not satisfy the Cardinal, but he had the good sense to let the matter drop. To do him justice he bore Corneille no lasting ill-will, otherwise he would doubtless have exerted his considerable influence to prevent the bestowal in March 1637 of a title of nobility on Corneille's father, a dignity which on the death of Pierre the elder two years later passed to his son. For all that, the affair of *Le Cid* rankled with the author, though the popularity of the play with the public was undiminished. For three years Corneille was silent, considering the strictures of the Academy and meditating on the technique of play-writing. Perhaps this delay was beneficial for when next he braved the critics—and it is significant that he abandoned medieval

Spain for ancient Rome—it was to put before the public in rapid succession the three great plays *Horace* (1640), *Cinna* (1640), and *Polyeucte* (1642–43).

The first of these, which the author tactfully dedicated to the Cardinal, was an undoubted success. So, too, was *Cinna*, which Corneille rightly considered to be one of his finest works. In *Polyeucte*, '*tragédie chrétienne*,' Corneille displayed to the full his power of handling a lofty theme. *Le Cid* had shown the triumph of honour, *Horace* the triumph of patriotism, *Cinna* the triumph of generosity. Now Corneille depicted the triumph of saintliness, a subject which to some proved disconcerting. At all events, Fontenelle, the nephew and biographer of Corneille, affirms that the play met with a tepid reception when the author read it in the salon of Mme de Rambouillet. This may well be, since fanaticism in any form does not blend harmoniously with the politeness and studied moderation of drawing-room society. Possibly there may have been an additional reason for this luke-warmness. At best, reading a play is a poor substitute for acting it, and Corneille did not read well, nor did he cut a striking figure in society. True, he was fairly tall and well-built. He had a prominent nose, an expressive face, keen eyes, and a wide mouth. Like most men of the day he wore a short beard trimmed to a point, but apart from that he made no concessions to fashion. He was untidy and careless in his dress, inclined to be taciturn and melancholy, independent of spirit and far more at ease in his domestic circle than in society. He could write of himself :

J'ai la plume féconde, et la bouche stérile,  
bon galant au théâtre, et fort mauvais en ville.

But when reproached for his lack of social graces, he could also say with justifiable pride : " Je ne suis pas moins pour cela Pierre Corneille."

"The first time I saw him," wrote a contemporary

observer, "I took him for a Rouen shopkeeper." The mistake was pardonable. Corneille was essentially a quiet, home-loving person and he had, in fact, ample opportunity to cultivate the domestic virtues. About two years after the death of his father, he married (1640-41) Marie de Lampérière, whose father held the post of *lieutenant particulier civil et criminel du bailliage de Gisors*. The first child of this union, Marie, was born in 1642 and five other children followed. In 1649 Thomas Corneille, eighteen years his brother's junior, married the younger sister of Pierre's wife, and thereafter the two households lived on terms of the closest intimacy, occupying adjoining houses in the Rue de la Pie and forming their own little community. In this pleasant domestic setting Pierre Corneille spent many years, living quietly and working hard, paying occasional visits to Paris, but continuing to discharge his official duties at Rouen and to act, like his father, as churchwarden of Saint-Sauveur. Probably he needed no inducement to go on writing, but in any case the necessity of supporting a growing family provided one.

In its very different manner, his comedy *Le Menteur* (1642 ?) was as much a masterpiece as *Cinna* or *Polyeucte*. Based on a comedy by the Spanish dramatist Alarcón, it is, unlike Corneille's earlier comedies, extremely amusing. The hero admittedly is a caricature rather than a character, but the twists in the plot are not artificially introduced: they are brought about as a direct result of Dorante's incorrigible passion for lying. Molière is supposed to have said that, had it not been for *Le Menteur*, he might not have written his own great social comedies. Corneille's piece, however, was much more than a mere stepping-stone for Molière: it was a classic in its own right. It also marked the close of the greatest period in his career. Thereafter, though he sometimes reached, he never altogether sustained, the same high level of excellence.

*La Mort de Pompée* (1642 ?) is now rarely performed and *La Suite du Menteur* (1644) shared the fate of most sequels in neither achieving nor wholly deserving the success of its predecessor. Both these pieces, like the previous ones, received their first performance at the *Marais*. But ill-health had forced Montdory to leave the stage and perhaps for this reason or because it was beginning to outstrip its rival, Corneille entrusted *Rodogune* (1644), and several subsequent plays to the *Hôtel de Bourgogne*. This tragedy he regarded as his best, but it suffered from having a complicated plot, a defect even more evident in *Héraclius* (1646-47). *Tbéodore* (1645-46), a tragedy of Christian martyrdom, as was *Polyeucte*, was a failure. *Andromède* (1650), a spectacular piece with 'effects' by the Italian Torelli and music by Dassoucy, was put on at the *Petit-Bourbon* and, though Corneille received 2400 livres for writing the words, it was of no great importance. *Don Sanche d'Aragon*, which followed, was a *comédie héroïque*, a term applied to plays in which the hero is of noble birth, but is spared the grievous perils that await his counterpart in tragedy. *Nicomède* (1651), in which seven years later Molière's company made their first appearance before Louis XIV, was, like *Rodogune*, a play of political intrigue with striking characters and a skilfully handled but involved plot. Its successor, *Pertharite* (1651-52), proved so dismal a failure that Corneille decided to give up writing for the stage.

During his retirement he busied himself with studying once again the problems of the dramatic art, later embodying his views in his *Trois Discours* and in those *Examens* of individual plays which are usually included in collected editions of his works. He was also engaged in translation, his major exercise in this being his verse rendering of the *Imitation of Christ*. In 1658 the smooth surface of his domestic life was temporarily ruffled. Molière, immediately prior to returning to Paris after twelve years in the

provinces, spent some weeks at Rouen, where one of the members of his company, Marquise du Parc, aroused in Corneille an emotion that was something more than admiration. From the wistful yet dignified verses that he penned, it is clear that he was deeply attracted to her. She, for her part, may well have been flattered by the attentions of so celebrated a playwright. But, though Corneille was famous, he was also fifty-two. His brother Thomas seems to have enjoyed rather more of the lady's favour than did Pierre, though it was with Racine some years later that she really fell in love. The episode at Rouen was a fleeting one, but it is perhaps no coincidence that among the characters in Corneille's later plays are elderly lovers, who are shown as men of worth and dignity, not as dodderers.

At all events, Corneille was soon too busy to spend much time in vain regrets. In 1659 Nicolas Fouquet who, until his imprisonment for embezzlement of public funds, was a munificent patron—as he could well afford to be—tempted Corneille back to the theatre. *Œdipe*, the resulting piece, had some success with the public as well as with the king. *La Toison d'Or* (1660), another *pièce à machines*, does not call for comment, but *Sertorius* (1662), for the production of which Corneille turned again to the *Marais*, contained fine passages and some well-drawn characters. *Sophonisbe* (1663), on the other hand, staged at the *Hôtel de Bourgogne*, earned praise for the leading actors, Montfleury and Floridor, but little for the author.

It was at about this time that Corneille finally decided to make his home in Paris, and it must have been with some regret that he severed the link which had for so long attached him to his native place. His reasons for taking this step cannot be set down with certainty, but it is not hard to divine some of them. His brother Thomas, still in the prime of life and anxious to consolidate his own



position as a playwright, may well have pointed out that it was easier to catch the eye of patrons from close range than from a distance. A deep bond of affection united the two households, so, with Thomas eager to settle in the capital, it would be natural for Pierre to accompany him in order to prevent a painful and needless separation. Besides, there was sound sense in the argument, which Corneille must have put to himself a score of times. The starveling poet, pathetically eager to dedicate an ode to anybody who would pay him a crown or two for the compliment, was only too familiar a figure in the contemporary world of letters. Corneille, of course, was in no such desperate plight. All the same, not even the most successful playwright could hope to make an adequate living from performances of his works or the sale of printed copies of them. Unless he had some alternative source of income—and Corneille had disposed by this time of his two salaried offices at Rouen—he must necessarily depend to some extent on the favours of wealthy patrons. A man of so independent a spirit as Corneille would not otherwise have dedicated the printed edition of *Horace* to Cardinal Richelieu.

It must be remembered, too, that Corneille's expenses were considerable. Although the rate of infant mortality in the seventeenth century was high, all his children, save one boy who died at the age of twelve, reached maturity. His eldest daughter married twice, and it is worth recalling that the celebrated Charlotte Corday was the great-grandchild of Marie Corneille and her second husband, M. de Farcy. Pierre's other children have little claim on the interest of posterity. Marguerite became a nun in Rouen, Thomas took holy orders in Touraine. Madeleine kept house for her father in his old age and eventually entered a convent. It is true that by 1664 two of these children were more or less launched in the world and therefore off

their father's hands. This very fact may have helped to loosen his ties with Rouen. But another son, destined to be killed in action in 1674, was a page in the household of the Duchesse de Nemours, while Pierre, the eldest, was an officer in a regiment of light horse. Both these had a position to maintain and must have looked to their father for financial help. Furthermore, Molière was by now firmly established as a dramatist, Racine's first play was staged in this same year 1664, and other playwrights, now largely forgotten, such as Boyer, Gilbert, and Quinault were enjoying some measure of success. Corneille's own more recent pieces had fared none too well, so there was something to be said for moving to Paris, in order to look after his interests and keep himself in touch with patrons.

In addition to all these probable reasons Corneille, beyond all doubt, had another. This was his membership of the French Academy, to which he had been elected in 1647. He was a conscientious person, and, although since resigning his offices he had been more readily able to pay visits to Paris, where the Duc de Guise gave him accommodation in his *bôtel* (now the *Palais des Archives* or Public Record Office), it was impossible for him under such circumstances to take his full share in the work of preparing the dictionary. Only by residence in Paris could he be a regular attendant at the Academy's meetings.

Thus it came about that Pierre and his brother moved to the capital, where they shared a house in the Rue des Deux Portes, which had the advantage of being conveniently near the *Hôtel de Bourgogne*. As a matter of fact, it was not at this theatre but before the court at Fontainebleau that Corneille's next play *Othon* was performed in 1664, and contemporary spectators may well have been correct in reading into the lines allusions to the King's ministers. *Agésilas* (1666) was a novelty in that it was written in rhymed free verse, though this did not save it from failure.

*Attila* (1667), presented by Molière's company, had an initial run of twenty performances and was revived later in the year, so that it has some claim to be reckoned a success. Owing to a ruse on the part of Henriette d'Angleterre, sister-in-law of Louis XIV and daughter of Charles I, Corneille's next play was on a subject on which Racine was also at work. The Princess, who died suddenly, did not live long enough to see the issue of this contest. It was, in fact, an unequal one, for Racine was approaching the zenith of his powers, whilst Corneille's *Tite et Bérénice* (1670) was the work of an ageing and tired man. Pressed for time, as so often in his career, Molière invited Corneille to help him in the writing of *Psyché* (1671) and his collaborator showed that he could still write effective verses. Only the most staunch champions, however, could find much to praise in *Pulchérie* (1672) and *Suréna* (1674), the two pieces that rounded off Corneille's long career as a playwright.

It is always sad to see a once great artist battling against advancing years and younger rivals, and one is tempted to regret that Corneille did not bow sooner to the inevitable. Such a view, though prompted by sympathy for a famous man and for his reputation, is at once unrealistic and mistaken. For one thing, a graph of Corneille's achievements would not show a progressive rise followed by a correspondingly uninterrupted fall. Almost throughout his career he had his ups and downs, like every pioneer and nearly every writer who is not consistently mediocre. Consequently even in his weakest plays there are scenes and passages that could ill be spared. Moreover, Corneille did not continue to write plays merely out of obstinacy or even from the hope that he would get the better of Racine. He wrote because he found fulfilment in writing and because, like the actors who presented his plays, he had to live.

This is not to say that the last ten years of Corneille's life were spent in dire poverty. That he lived in straitened circumstances is probable, for the Rue d'Argenteuil on the Butte Saint Roch, to which he moved two years before his death, is in a poorer quarter of Paris than the one in which he had first settled. There was no money from new plays to come in. He had made a good deal in his heyday, but not much more than he had to spend with a large family to support. The pension paid by Fouquet had lapsed with that minister's disgrace. It is true that Corneille was in receipt of pensions awarded by the Crown. Unfortunately waging wars and building palaces cost money, with the result that after 1673 Pierre, like many another author, received no pension at all. Only just before his death, and, so it is said, on the urgent plea of Boileau, was payment restored.

Corneille, then, cannot be accounted a very prosperous man, nor during his last years did his literary reputation remain undiminished. When he died on October 1, 1684, the gossip Dangeau made a nonchalant note in his diary recording the death of "le bonhomme Corneille." This entry is no more than a condescending and perfunctory tribute to a man of whom, in the diarist's opinion, the world would hear no more. Subsequent history has not borne out that view. Indeed, the extent of Corneille's loss of reputation in his later years and immediately after his death has been exaggerated, as statistics prove. His contemporaries cannot have thought so little of his weaker plays as we do, for early records of the *Comédie Française* show that over a period of twenty years at the close of the seventeenth century *Polyeucte* and *Héraclius*, pieces of widely different merit, each received forty-eight performances, while *Œdipe* had as many as fifty-six.

The truth is that seventeenth-century spectators relished plays in which characters sacrificed honour and patriotism

to political ambition, which was what both Condé and Turenne actually did at certain stages of their careers. Conversely, in accordance with the prevailing taste for *galanterie*, audiences enjoyed plays in which characters sacrificed everything for love. In his later plays Corneille introduced personages of both these types, deserting the path that he had pursued so effectively between 1636 and 1642. To us this is a matter of regret, because we find such characters neither admirable nor sympathetic. Many of his contemporaries, however, cannot have held this view. Some of the plays are now seldom acted, but posterity has not failed to recognize the greatness of the rest. There is ample proof of this in the testimony of generations of literary critics. Statistics also provide concise and convincing evidence. In the two and a half centuries that have elapsed since his death, the *Comédie Française* itself has given more than 5,000 performances of his plays, an average of over twenty every year. How wrong Dangeau was!

#### 4. CORNEILLE AS A DRAMATIST

Corneille's fame rests upon his tragedies. His comedy, *Le Menteur*, was, like *Les Plaideurs* of Racine, only a felicitous but fleeting deviation from the path of tragedy that he followed almost unswervingly once he had taken his bearings. Some critics may award pride of place to Corneille, others to Racine. Whichever be correct, they are all agreed that the former occupies a proud position in the annals of French literature, a view which nearly every Frenchman, professional critic or not, would endorse. But what about the Englishman? And what about the English schoolboy or schoolgirl who, as likely as not, is compulsorily introduced to the playwright because one or

other of his works is set for a particular examination? An acquaintanceship with Molière made under such conditions can readily ripen into friendship. To appreciate Corneille is less easy.

Voltaire, an extremely intelligent person, was one of the earliest of French critics to praise Shakespeare. Nevertheless, reared as he was in the classical tradition, he found in the plays much that was barbarous and offensive to his taste. It is not unreasonable therefore that English people should, on their side, be inclined to do less than justice to Corneille, because the dramatic conventions of French classical tragedy are so alien from our own. In *Antony and Cleopatra* there are numerous changes of scene. In *A Winter's Tale* a period of sixteen years is supposed to elapse between one act and the next. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the mortal lovers, the fairies, and the 'rude mechanicals' constitute distinct strands in the rope that goes to make up the composite action. In *Hamlet* the comic gravedigger bandies words with the Prince, prose alternates with verse, Laertes and Hamlet fight to the death in view of the audience. In comparison with all this, French tragedy, with its slightness of incident, its limitations of time and space, its restricted vocabulary and its consistently dignified tone, may well seem cold, formal, stilted, even dull. Yet that Corneille was a great playwright is undeniable. He stood out among his own contemporaries and also set his mark so firmly on French tragedy that it remained essentially unchanged until the literary revolution brought about by the Romantics in the nineteenth century. In other words, he improved an existing road and also blazed a trail for others to follow. He was at once an accomplished craftsman and a pioneer.

The works of Shakespeare are a bad yardstick by which to measure the achievements of Corneille. So far as freedom of movement was concerned the Englishman

could, to adapt the words of Hamlet, almost count himself a king of infinite space, whereas the Frenchman was not far from being bounded in a nutshell. Yet this did not cause Corneille to work on a miniature scale. On the contrary, his conception of tragedy was grand, even grandiose.

Hardy, as we have seen, rendered service to the theatre by substituting for the didactic and undramatic tragedy of Jodelle and Garnier plays that were full of stirring incident. This developed in the public a liking for the improbable and the extraordinary. Even educated men shared this taste, for, in their report on *Le Cid*, the Academicians expressed regret that the Count, who had been killed in a duel, should not have been restored to life at the end of the play. This indicates that they understood melodrama, but failed almost entirely to appreciate the great step forward that Corneille had taken. For him, a play did not consist of striking incidents to be arranged as the ingenuity and discretion of the author might suggest. On the contrary, he created his characters and provided the initial situation in which they found themselves. From that point the protagonists appeared to work out their own destiny. Events succeeded one another, not, so it seemed, at the will of the author, but as the inevitable outcome of conflict between characters who remained true to their lights and who did what they did because they were what they were. The development, in short, was logical and inexorable and all the more enthralling and impressive on that account. Unexpected and ingenious twists in the plot are effective in farce or in the modern 'comedy-thriller.' Did tragedy depend on such devices it would be tedious to see the same one twice: yet this is seldom so. Indeed, the spectator may derive additional pleasure from the fact that he is better informed than the characters in the play, and can look on with mingled awe and interest as the piece proceeds remorselessly to its appointed end.

This is not to say that the plot must necessarily be familiar. Corneille, for his part, shared the contemporary liking for *une action illustre, extraordinaire, sérieuse*. He went further and included the adjective *invraisemblable*. But to avoid the danger of putting before an audience a story so improbable as to arouse incredulity, he was careful to choose events either authenticated by history or at least sanctioned by legend and tradition. This practice was of advantage to him in two ways. First, in an age when the heroic romances of La Calprenède were widely read, and at a time when stirring events and colourful personalities were plentiful in the contemporary scene, he could gratify the prevailing taste for a full-blooded story. Secondly, with such a plot he could put upon the stage characters who, measured against lesser events, might have seemed incongruous because they were larger than life. Figures drawn on a heroic scale called for a story of equally generous proportions. Hence his fondness for the *invraisemblable*, especially when the unlikely happened to be the true.

Because he thought of tragedy as something which exalts and uplifts, Corneille selected *les grands sujets qui remuent fortement les passions*. As a *grand sujet* is not necessarily a simple one he sometimes found difficulty in fitting it into the narrow frame of the unities. It must be admitted, too, that his predilection for a complicated plot was occasionally so strong that some of his plays are difficult to follow. But this is true only of pieces written during his later years. In his prime Corneille could handle a strong plot with masterly skill, preferring as a rule to treat of *quelque grand intérêt de l'État ou quelque passion plus noble et plus mâle que l'amour*. This substitution of, say, politics, as in *Cinna* and *Rodogune*, for love as the main-spring of a tragedy may not have commended itself greatly to the ladies of the salons: it was not, however, likely to



displease a man like Condé who, while ready to indulge in polite dalliance, was not thereby prevented from occupying himself with more important matters, such as fighting both for and against the king. Racine did not share this view. For him love, usually irresistible and generally disastrous, was the essential theme, whereas for Corneille love was a passion, admittedly powerful, but one to be subdued by the majority of those characters whom he most wishes us to admire.

A century later Voltaire maintained that in a tragedy love must hold either pride of place or none at all. Corneille's relegation of it in a number of his plays to a secondary position may have been ill-advised but his decision was due to his conception of tragedy as something lofty, even sublime. He was far more interested in human strength than in human weakness. In consequence he had to guard against rendering his heroes and heroines cold and unsympathetic to an audience of ordinary frail and sinful men and women.

He realized that he must have at least one *personnage sympathique*, with whom the spectators could in some degree identify themselves, and whom they would wish to see prosper. The lack of such a character had made many sixteenth-century plays chilling and unattractive. Corneille's immediate predecessors, it is true, were careful to introduce a *personnage sympathique*. Too often, however, he was entirely divorced from reality, a mere performer of incredible exploits. Corneille's personages are not of this artless sort. The hero of many a book or play, faced with a choice between good or evil, can choose the right without effort, if only because he is the hero. Corneille's characters, though of heroic stature, are not serene and passionless demigods. In his plays virtue and vice may receive their appropriate rewards, but the course of events is determined by the actions of the characters and these

actions depend on the decisions that they make. Now these decisions are not lightly arrived at. As the critic, Emile Faguet, has pointed out, the word *combat* occurs more than a thousand times in Corneille's plays. Sometimes the word is used with reference to duels and battles. Far more often, the struggle is mental and spiritual, not physical. The conflict may be between two persons holding opposing views. It may equally well take place in the bosom of a single individual who has to choose between two courses of action. In the former case the contest is fought out in trenchant dialogue, in the latter in soliloquy.

Many plays must have as their theme a struggle between good and evil. The hero torn between inclination and duty was no new figure, though Corneille presented him more forcefully than other French playwrights before him. When he used this situation he did not weight the scales so heavily on one side as to render the decision automatic and obvious. As a rule, the choice was hard to make because the issue lay between conflicting emotions or obligations that in themselves were almost equally compelling and praiseworthy. The struggle might be engaged between two persons each actuated by a lofty motive, or it might proceed in the breast of one person owing allegiance to two conflicting loyalties. In other words—and this is the important point—the real drama took place in the mind and spirit of the characters.

Corneille sought to uplift and inspire, to arouse admiration for noble conduct rather than pity for the downfall of those who might have been great. He created people capable not only of rising above adversity, but of deriving positive pride in doing so. Therein lay *la gloire* so highly prized by his characters. Though there are weaklings among them, most of them are resolute and enduring, yielding neither to caprice, to impulse, nor to despair. While analysing their emotions they may give way to

lamentations, but they soon take a grip on themselves and look their problems in the face. For Corneille, as for Descartes, the source and instrument of man's greatness is his will. Through reason he can discern what ought to be done. It is within his power to choose his course of action and it is by the deliberate exercise of his will that he can carry out his intention.

Characters so conceived can readily inspire awe and respect. They may also appear so aloof, remote, and superhuman as not to be recognizable as creatures of flesh and blood. It is a tribute to Corneille's genius that, in his best plays at least, they do not convey this impression. Personages in a classical tragedy lack the incidental attributes, the trappings of human nature. We do not know, nor would it occur to us to wonder, what they have to eat, or how they spend their spare time. They are, so to speak, cleared for action, gaining in intensity because what is temporary or unessential has been shorn away. When the emotions they feel, and the difficulties they face, are so presented that, for all their sublimity, they are yet part of ordinary human experience, the portraits may have a universal application and be true of every country and of every age.

At his best Corneille could achieve this universality. But since it is by words that the action is carried forward and through words that the characters make themselves and their thoughts known, the effectiveness of his plays would necessarily have been less marked, but for his mastery of language.

Since the taste of the time limited a playwright's vocabulary to some 2000 words, there is in the plays little picturesque imagery or elaborate metaphor. Corneille's verse is fine and virile. He can produce magnificent tirades which, as Mme de Sévigné put it, *font frissonner*. He can write crisp, decisive dialogue in which the verses

are like the swift, purposeful exchanges of two accomplished fencers. He can vary his tempo to suit the mood of the characters and the needs of the situation, following a long passage with a few telling monosyllables. He can produce a maxim with admirable economy of words: "La fourbe n'est que le jeu des petites âmes" (*Nicomède*). He can be drily humorous: "Les gens que vous tuez se portent assez bien" (*Le Menteur*). He knows how to make a character reveal himself in a single line: "On m'appelle soldat; je fais gloire de l'être" (*Don Sanche d'Aragon*). His soliloquies are compact and cogent. He can ring the changes on a few words, for example:

Il m'a fait trop de bien pour en dire du mal.

Il m'a fait trop de mal pour en dire du bien.

(Quatrain on Richelieu)

His most characteristic verses are resonant, yet concise. They call for something of the grand manner in delivery, and this is in keeping with the lofty tone of his tragedies as a whole.

Molière, whose facility in versifying aroused the admiration of Boileau, is credited with a shrewd criticism of Corneille's style. "He has," he is supposed to have remarked, "a familiar who dictates admirable verses to him. But now and again this familiar falls silent and leaves him to his own devices, as though curious to see how he will manage unaided." Certainly there were times when Corneille's inspiration flagged and he would produce passages that seem either over-written or flat. Such blemishes were not confined to his style. He faltered occasionally in his character-drawing, so that those whom he intends to be great shed their humanity and forfeit our sympathy and our interest. In their desire to be *généreux* they adopt a false scale of values and, faced with two alternatives, choose the more difficult. This gratifies their thirst for glory, but leaves us cold.

But these are the weaknesses of the lesser plays. They apply scarcely at all to *Le Cid*, *Horace*, *Cinna*, or *Polyeucte*. In each of these the spectators witness and enter into a tense and enthralling struggle which takes place in the mind or spirit of one or more of the personages. In each, these characters, instead of being the slaves or puppets of fortune, can make themselves masters of their actions. In each, likewise, it is only by an exceptional effort of will and at sore cost either to themselves or to someone dear to them that the principal characters are able to rise superior to fate or circumstance.

From the general we may now turn to the particular, and see how these principles of tragedy as Corneille conceived it, may be observed in one of his most famous plays.

## 5. A NOTE ON FRENCH VERSIFICATION

By R. P. L. Ledésert

Lyrical poetry in France in the sixteenth century flourished under the leadership of Ronsard, who introduced new stanzas and hitherto unfamiliar forms of poetic expression. But it is characteristic of the less spontaneous seventeenth century that more emphasis should have been laid on the importance of form, establishing for the first time in the history of French literature definite rules of versification.

The literary critics of the century laid too much emphasis, perhaps, on what we would consider minor details, such as the position of the *cæsura*, or the famous *enjambement* which was to excite so much rebellion among Romantics almost two centuries later. And in illustration

of this we cannot do better than to quote here the leading seventeenth-century French critic, Boileau :

N'offrez rien au lecteur que ce qui peut lui plaire,  
Ayez pour la cadence une oreille sévère,  
Que toujours dans vos vers le sens coupant les mots  
Suspende l'hémistiché, en marque le repos.  
Gardez qu'une voyelle à courir trop hâtée,  
Ne soit d'une voyelle en son chemin heurtée.

(*L'Art Poétique*, Chant I, lines 103 *et seq.*)

The rules of French versification, though contained in the lines quoted above, are not quite so simple as they may appear and it may be that a few words of explanation are not out of place here.

# 1. SCANSION.

Each verse is divided into a certain number of *piés*. The *pié* in French versification corresponds to a single syllable, and not to the group of syllables known as *foot* in English poetry :

Les	uns,	par	ce	qu'ils	sont	me	chants	et	mal	fai	sants
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

(MOLIÈRE, *Le Misanthrope*, Act I, Scene 1)

# 2. MUTE E (*e muet*).

(a) When a mute *e* appears in a syllable placed at the end of a word in the body of a line, two cases are to be considered :

(i) when the mute *e* is followed by a consonant, it is counted as a *pié* :

J'o	se	m'i	ma	gi	ner	qu'à	ses	moins	dres	ex	ploits
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

(CORNEILLE, *Le Cid*, Act II, Scene 5)

(ii) when the mute *e* is followed by a word beginning with a vowel or *h* mute, the syllable in which it is contained is not counted as a *pié* :

Et,	com	me il	voit	en	nous	des	à	mes	peu	com	munes
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

(CORNEILLE, *Horace*, Act II, Scene 3)

(b) When a syllable placed at the end of a word at the end of a line contains a mute *e*, it is not counted as a *piéd* :

Nous	se	rons	les	mi	roirs	d'u	ne	ver	tu	bien	rare
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

(CORNEILLE, *Horace*, Act II, Scene 3)

This applies even if the *e* is followed by *s* or *nt* :

Et,	com	me il	voit	en	nous	des	à	mes	peu	com	munes
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

### 3. METRE (*mètre*).

(a) The line of 12 syllables was the type of verse most commonly used in the seventeenth century. It is known as the *alexandrin*, a name which is believed to originate from *Le Roman d'Alexandre* (twelfth century) which employed a primitive form of this verse.

But other types of metre were nevertheless used in the seventeenth century.

(b) The 10-syllable line :

Puis	qu'au	jour	d'hus	mon	pè	re est	l'of	fen	sé
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

(CORNEILLE, *Le Cid*, Act I, Scene 6)

(c) The 8-syllable line :

Per	cé	jus	ques	au	fond	du	cœur
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

(CORNEILLE, *Le Cid*, Act I, Scene 6)

(d) The 7-syllable line :

Donc	le	ré	cit	est	men	teur
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(LA FONTAINE)

(e) The 6-syllable line, which in fact is a half-alexandrine :

Ce	de au	coup	qui	me	tue
	2	3	4	5	6

(CORNEILLE, *Le Cid*, Act I, Scene 6)

Other types of metre were rarely used in the seventeenth century.

4. RHYME (*rime*).

The rhyme consists of the recurrence in the last syllable of a line of the sound found at the end of the preceding line. The essential of French rhyme is to achieve similarity of sound and appearance, with the result that words are held to rhyme in French which to an English ear would not appear to do so. Moreover, the rhyme can consist of identical last syllables of polysyllabic words :

Une vaine frayeur tantôt m'a pu troubler,  
Et je suis insensible alors qu'il faut trembler.

There are two main types of rhyme :

(a) the *feminine* rhyme where the last syllable is mute :

Pour grands que soient les rois, ils sont ce que nous sommes,  
Ils peuvent se tromper comme les autres hommes.

(CORNEILLE, *Le Cid*, Act I, Scene 3)

(b) the *masculine* rhyme in which the last syllable is sounded :

Mourir pour le pays est un si digne sort,  
Qu'on briguerait en foule une si belle mort.

(CORNEILLE, *Horace*, Act II, Scene 3)

But each of these types of rhyme is subdivided into two further groups :

If the syllable of which the rhyme consists begins with the same consonant in the two lines, the rhyme is called *riche*. Thus, a *rime féminine riche* is :

Madame, je sais trop à quel excès de rage  
La vengeance d'Hélène emporta mon courage.

(RACINE, *Andromaque*, Act IV, Scene 5)

While a *rime masculine riche* is :

Achevez votre hymen, j'y consens ; mais du moins,  
Ne forcez pas mes yeux d'en être les témoins.

(RACINE, *Andromaque*, Act IV, Scene 5)



On the other hand, if the consonants are different, the rhyme is called *suffisante* :

Vous ne répondez point ? Perfide, je le *voi*,  
Tu comptes les moments que tu perds avec *moi* !

(RACINE, *Andromaque*, Act IV, Scene 5)

This is a *rime masculine suffisante*.

## 5. CÆSURA (*la césure*).

The ideal alexandrine line is divided into two equal parts of six *pièds* each by the cæsura. Each of these half alexandrines is called an *hémistiche*, and the break (or cæsura) must not occur in the middle of a word :

J'ai vu trancher les jours	de ma famille entière
<hr/>	<hr/>
1st hemistich	2nd hemistich
Et mon époux sanglant	trainé sur la poussière,
<hr/>	<hr/>
1st hemistich	2nd hemistich

(RACINE, *Andromaque*, Act III, Scene 6)

Thus the voice rests at the end of the sixth syllable, and then at the end of the line. This accounts for the apparent monotony of French classical verse to an inexperienced ear.

## 6. ENJAMBEMENT.

The term *enjambement* is applied to denote a phrase which begins at the end of one line and is continued at the beginning of the next. Though this was forbidden by the critics in the seventeenth century, La Fontaine used it quite frequently :

Sire, répond l'agneau, *que votre Majeste*  
*Ne se mette pas en colère.*

(LA FONTAINE, *Le Loup et l'Agneau*)

7. HIATUS.

The hiatus was also forbidden by the seventeenth-century critics. It occurs when an accented vowel placed at the end of a word is followed by another accented vowel beginning the following words; or as Boileau expressed it :

Gardez qu'une voyelle à courir trop hâtée,  
Ne soit d'une voyelle en son chemin heurtée.

Frequent examples of hiatus are to be found in the poetry of the Middle Ages or of the Renaissance :

Semblablement, où est la royne  
Qui commanda que Buridan  
Fust gecté en ung sac en Saine ?  
(VILLON, *Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis*)

8. THE ALTERNATION OF MASCULINE AND FEMININE RHYMES IN ALEXANDRINE VERSE.

The accepted rule in the seventeenth century was that couplets ending with masculine rhymes should alternate with couplets ending with feminine rhymes :

Où, je viens dans son temple adorer l'Éternel :	}	masc.
Je viens, selon l'usage antique et solennel,		
Célébrer avec vous la fameuse journée	}	fem.
Où sur le mont Sina la loi nous fut donnée.		
Que les temps sont changés ! Sitôt que de ce jour	}	masc.
La trompette sacrée annonçait le retour,		
Du temple, orné partout de festons magnifiques,	}	fem.
Le peuple saint en foule inondait les portiques ;		

(RACINE, *Athalie*, Act I, Scene 1)

There are many other intricacies of French versification. This is not the place to discuss them. The purpose of this note is to enable the reader to understand and appreciate the main principles of French versification. For deeper study reference should be made to Martinon's *Les Strophes*.

## 6. "LE CID": THE PLAY

The exact date of the first performance of *Le Cid* is uncertain. It must have been either at the very end of 1636 or during the first ten days of 1637. We can be sure of this because, in a letter dated January 22, Chapelain, happily unaware that he would shortly be required by Richelieu to comment adversely on the piece, referred to the success it had enjoyed "*depuis quinze jours*," a phrase that he may have used somewhat loosely. As to the cast, we know only that Montdory created the rôle of Rodrigue and Mlle de Villiers that of Chimène. In his *Historiettes* Tallemant des Réaux, who had a ready ear for gossip, affirmed that Montdory was in love with this actress who, for her part, detested him. If so, strained relations did not prevent the pair from acting splendidly together, any more than did Molière's estrangement from his wife.

It has often been said that Corneille chose the subject of what was to be the first really great play in French literature, because his attention was drawn to it by M. de Chalon, the former French Ambassador in Madrid, who was spending his years of retirement in Rouen. This may have been so, but Corneille may equally well have made his own choice, for there was a sizeable Spanish community living in Rouen and many Spanish books were published in that city. Scudéry, eaten up by envy and malice, asserted, it will be remembered, that credit for such few good qualities as *Le Cid* possessed should go by rights to the Spanish playwright Guillen de Castro, not to Corneille at all. It is, of course, true that Corneille derived some of the most effective situations in his play from *Las Mocedades del Cid* (1618). But only in his *Excuse à Ariste*<sup>1</sup> did he try to deny his debt. In several editions of his play, he

<sup>1</sup> See page li.

went to the length of italicizing verses that were more or less exact translations of lines occurring in the Spanish piece. In any case, Scudéry's accusation might with as much justice have been levelled at many another writer. Original plots are few, so that most authors are bound to borrow either deliberately or unconsciously from other writers. Castro himself drew upon the *Romancero*, a vast store of popular poetry which deals, among very many other subjects, with the doings of El Cid. Shakespeare derived the raw material of his plays from chronicles, histories, and the works of other dramatists. We do not think the worse of him on that account, since it is the treatment of the subject that matters. On this score Corneille had no need to fear comparison with Castro (1567-1631).

Robin Hood, one suspects, bore in fact scant resemblance to the chivalrous outlaw whose doings are set out in ancient ballads. The same holds good of Don Rodrigo Ruy Díaz, known as the 'Cid,' a name derived from the Arabic 'Seid,' meaning 'Chief,' and bestowed upon him with reluctant admiration by the Moors whom he defeated in battle. The son of Don Diego Laynez, he was born near Burgos about the year 1030 and died in 1099. At first in the service of the king of Castille, he fought against that monarch's brother Alfonso from whom by a discreditable ruse he wrested the kingdom of Leon. On the assassination of Don Sancho of Castille, Alfonso succeeded to the throne and Rodrigo entered his service, marrying the king's cousin Ximena. Later he was the victim of false accusations and became a mercenary, fighting by turns for Christian and for Mussulman. Eventually he made himself ruler of Valencia by right of conquest. In history, therefore, he was a successful, intrepid but unscrupulous soldier. Legend transformed him into a chivalrous patriot, persecuted by ungrateful monarchs and loyally striving to

rid Spain of the Moorish invader. The legend built up and perpetuated in various portions of the *Romancero* proved hardy and attractive. It was still alive in the nineteenth century when Napoleon, in the hope, doubtless, of reconciling Spaniards to the presence of French troops in their country, directed that the remains of the Cid should be removed from his grave in the grounds of a convent near Burgos and reinterred "with full military honours" in the city itself. It is doubtful whether this gesture had any great effect upon the populace. At all events, in 1842, the remains were again removed and placed in an improvised chapel in the Town Hall. Finally, in 1921, the late king Alfonso XIII caused the body to be removed once more and laid to rest in the crypt of Burgos cathedral. So much for the Cid of history and legend. Our concern, however, is neither with him, nor with the character presented by Castro, but with Corneille's play which bears the hero's name. The plot of it can be set down in a few lines.

Rodrigue and Chimène, in love with one another, are hopeful that their respective fathers will agree to their marriage. Unfortunately Don Diègue, Rodrigue's father, is appointed by the King to a post that Chimène's father, Don Gomès, had coveted. Nettled by this, the latter quarrels with Don Diègue and strikes him. The old man, too feeble to avenge this affront, charges his son to do so. Rodrigue complies and kills Don Gomès in a duel, whereupon Chimène appeals to the King for sentence of death to be passed on Rodrigue. Fernand temporizes and Rodrigue in an interview with Chimène admits that, although he acted in accordance with the dictates of honour, she is justified in her demand. At that point the Moors launch a surprise attack upon the city and Rodrigue, putting himself at the head of a small force, heavily defeats them. Admiring his gallantry, Chimène nevertheless

renews her pleas for justice and accepts Don Sanche as her champion in a duel with Rodrigue. Believing the latter killed, she acknowledges her love for him, only to press once more for justice against her father's slayer when she realizes that Rodrigue has been the victor in the encounter. The King, however, will have none of it, and the play ends with the prospect that in due time the marriage of the sorely tried pair will take place.

It is plain from this outline that *Le Cid*, although less crammed with incident than the plays of Hardy, does contain a good many happenings, considerably more than Racine introduced into his tragedies. Writing later in the century, Racine was able to profit by the lessons and example of Corneille who, for his part, had no such guide to lead him along the road towards classic simplicity. As a result, Racine had no trouble with the unities, whereas they caused Corneille endless difficulty. The unities of both time and place for instance, are imperfectly respected in *Le Cid*. Historically the scene should have been laid in Burgos, but Corneille transferred it to Seville in order to render the incursion of the Moors by sea more plausible. Further, although the action takes place in Seville throughout, it is apparent from the text of the play that some events must in fact occur in the King's palace, others in Chimène's house, and others in a street or public square. Wisely Corneille does not draw attention to these slight changes, but leaves the exact locality vague, so that it has been said with some justice that for him unity of place really means nullity of place. The unity of time he does contrive to respect, but at some sacrifice of probability. Rodrigue fights two duels, defeats the Moors, appears at court, has important conversations with his father and with Chimène and soliloquizes more than once, all this in the space of twenty-four hours. No wonder that a critic observed that Corneille's characters often seem to have their eye on the

clock! Castro, in his play, was not so pressed for time and, in consequence, avoided a difficulty that Corneille, bound by the unities, could not escape. In particular, the Frenchman had no wholly satisfactory answer to the charge that Chimène was guilty of a lack of womanly feeling since, though she conscientiously pressed her case against Rodrigue, she nevertheless admitted her love for the man who had killed her father but a few hours earlier. Contemporary critics and later writers, notably Dumas *filz*, were quick to condemn this "unnatural behaviour," but it is precisely because she was *une femme cornélienne* that she admired Rodrigue the more for having performed his duty. Moreover, it should be remembered that with a greater lapse of time between one act and the next there could have been no ground for this accusation. It was only the necessity of compressing all the events of the play into twenty-four hours that gave rise to the criticism. Fortunately, the point is not one that is likely to mar the play for the English reader or spectator.

When first published, *Le Cid* was described as a tragic-comedy. Only in subsequent editions was it called a tragedy and the original label was not inappropriate. This is partly because, although the treatment throughout is serious and a major character is killed, the ending is happy, or at least holds the promise of being so, for Rodrigue and Chimène. There is also the fact that one or two incidents, notably the misunderstanding through which Chimène is led to reveal her true feelings for Rodrigue, belong to the domain of tragic-comedy. The same applies to some of the subsidiary characters who, while employing the same lofty style of speech as the others, seem nevertheless to move on a lower plane. Both the King and Don Sanche are lacking in stature as compared with the hero and heroine, while the Infanta has so little hold on the interest of the spectators that, when *Le Cid* was performed before

Napoleon, this rôle was omitted entirely, apparently without detriment to the play. No such mutilation would have been possible with *Horace* or *Polyeucte*.

This is not to imply that these secondary personages are ill-conceived. On the contrary, they serve two useful purposes. By their intentional mediocrity they enhance the greatness of the others and, with the possible exception of the Infanta, they are essential to the working out of the plot. In their own right also they have clearly-defined characteristics, as well as being foils to other personages in the play.

Don Sanche is an unsuccessful suitor and, as such, plays a somewhat thankless rôle in comparison with Rodrigue. The latter goes from strength to strength, displaying ever greater resolution and courage in facing the ordeals that his own conception of honour and Chimène's high sense of duty place in his path and, indeed, help to create. Don Sanche does not develop in this way. He is static, rather than dynamic, but he is neither contemptible nor ridiculous. Himself unseasoned in war, he shows gallantry and spirit in electing to fight against Rodrigue who, as the play progresses, becomes a more and more redoubtable antagonist. Moreover, actuated by love for Chimène, but also passionate in upholding the code of honour, Don Sanche stands up for the dead Don Gomès even to the extent of incurring the King's displeasure. Only at the end does he, so to speak, fade out of the picture by accepting the situation almost too readily and leaving us, therefore, as Corneille doubtless intended, with less sympathy to spare for him than we might otherwise have felt.

Napoleon regretted the omission of the part of the Infanta from the version of *Le Cid* presented before him, maintaining that the love of so exalted a personage was a greater testimony to the worth of Rodrigue than the passion shown for him by Chimène who was not of royal blood. The Emperor would have been on surer ground



had he argued that the Infanta plays the same part in relation to Rodrigue as Don Sanche does to Chimène. Both these subordinate characters help to preserve the balance of the play. Both are fated to have their hopes dashed and stand for a type of emotion which, though sufficiently sincere, seems commonplace in comparison with the imperious yet idealistic love that Rodrigue and Chimène feel for and inspire in one another. There, however, the resemblance between these secondary personages ends. Don Sanche is a straightforward character, whereas the Infanta is something of a schemer. She is a serio-comic figure in that she is more successful in deluding herself than in deceiving others. She forces herself to believe that, if she loves Rodrigue, *un simple gentilhomme*, it is for his courage, not for himself. Pride of birth constrains her to struggle against her own fondness for him, but she cannot resist the temptation to rejoice when circumstances bid fair to separate the two lovers, for is it not conceivable that Rodrigue's gallantry and renown might make up for his unprincely status and so render him a fit mate for a king's daughter? For this reason she suggests that the ends of justice would be best served if Chimène banished Rodrigue from her presence instead of having him put to death. This artless suggestion, the outcome of a very human conflict between pride of birth and personal inclination, meets with no response from Chimène. Nor, to be frank, can the spectator feel much sympathy for the Infanta or interest in her manœuvres. The reason is that, even if Chimène did fall in with the suggestion, the princess would gain nothing, because Rodrigue has no thought for anyone but Chimène. He is unaware of the affection the Infanta has for him despite herself and would feel nothing, except perhaps some embarrassment, if he did know of it. In any event, therefore, the battle is lost so far as the Infanta is concerned. The spectators

realize this even though she does not. Her rôle as a result is inevitably a minor and a rather tedious one.

The Infanta's father is not, in some respects, a forceful character. He takes, for example, no active steps to repel the Moors, though he warmly commends Rodrigue for defeating them. But it must be remembered that Don Fernand is described as the *first* king of Castille. This would imply that he rules over a country only recently liberated from the Moors and also that his authority within his kingdom is none too firmly established. Thus it is not easy for him to give an instant and authoritative decision in the dispute between Don Diègue and Chimène (Act II, Scene 8), especially as the code of honour is involved, about which the nobles of his court feel strongly. The King, too, can see both points of view and this renders his position difficult. But he is not lacking in shrewdness. He believes in the healing power of time, and, when finally convinced of Chimène's unfaltering love for Rodrigue, he gently but firmly overrides her conscientious protests. Fernand, in short, is neither a hothead nor a fool. He can claim no credit for the turn of events, but he intervenes in a sensible and kindly manner when opportunity offers, in order to preserve a doughty defender of his kingdom and to give to the lovers the prospect of the happiness of which they have shown themselves worthy.

Although Don Gomès disappears early from the scene, it is his hotness of temper that sets the drama in motion and his death that constantly spurs Chimène on until the very end of the play. His portrait has therefore to be painted with rapid and decisive strokes. Corneille does this with great skill. He succeeds in making the Count hateful enough for us to understand Don Diègue's furious sense of humiliation, yet sufficiently likeable for us to realize that Chimène is filled with grief by his death, and not merely actuated by a sense of duty in seeking to avenge it.

The unfavourable impression is conveyed clearly by the arrogant tone the Count adopts at the very outset of his interview with Don Diègue. In his disappointment at being passed over he employs contempt and insinuation, hinting that Don Diègue has secured by intrigue what he would have failed to obtain on merit. On the other hand, after the quarrel, it is evident that Don Gomès regrets his behaviour, though he cannot humble himself to the extent of retracting his words. He does his best, too, to deter Rodrigue from forcing him into an encounter which the Count, confident in his own prowess, is sure must end disastrously for a youth whose spirit he admires. Quick temper and arrogance are the Count's failings. These lead him to his death, but they are not vices of the kind to kill a daughter's fondness for him.

The difference between Don Gomès and Don Diègue is not merely one of age. The Count glories in his own strength, whereas Don Diègue is proud, not arrogant. In order to appreciate the extent of the humiliation he suffers at the hands of Don Gomès, it is essential to remember the obligations of the Spanish code of honour. Writing later in the century, Calderón portrayed in his plays husbands who avenge themselves on their wives, not only for actual infidelity, but for conduct that has given rise, however unjustly, to gossip. The merest breath of suspicion was held sufficient to tarnish the family honour and justify a vengeance of refined cruelty. Such a code seems false and repellent to us. But we can understand the feelings of Don Diègue who is the victim, not of a fancied wrong, but of a dishonouring insult. He is a patriarchal figure and the blow dealt him by Don Gomès is a deadly affront not only to the old man himself, but to the proud family of which he has been until that moment a worthy representative. Hence his rage and despair at his own powerlessness. Hence, too, his brushing aside of

Rodrigue's love for Chimène as something of little importance in comparison with the restoration of the family honour. Beside that, everything else is insignificant. It is not that he lacks paternal affection. It is rather that circumstances prevent him from showing it until the stain on the honour of the family has been removed. The glory gained by Rodrigue in killing the Count is added to the store already acquired by Don Diègue and his forebears. To add to it still more Don Diègue urges his son on to lead the assault against the Moors and even accepts in his name a duel with Don Sanche. So would he have acted in his own younger days; how then can his son, who has brought such glory to the family, do less? We see nothing of Don Diègue while these various encounters are in progress but it would be wrong to deduce from this that he feels no worry or anxiety. It is only that for Don Diègue, honour, the good name of the family, means everything.

Rodrigue is a worthy son of his father and shares his outlook. But love for Chimène renders him less single-minded and far more likeable than his sire. His soliloquy, when he learns the nature of the task set him, has been condemned as unduly full of antithesis and other literary conceits. Perhaps it is. Yet its substance is natural and dramatically effective. At first he is stunned, then aghast and, though he nerves himself to go where honour bids him, he suffers intensely while making his decision. Nor does his suffering end when the duel is over, since he fears that the stroke which killed Don Gomès has put an end to his hopes of marrying Chimène and perhaps to her love for him as well.

Young though they are—and despite the formal style of the play, *Le Cid* is imbued with the spirit of youth—Rodrigue and Chimène understand one another. Their love is not born merely of physical attraction. It is the outcome also of recognition of and admiration for each

other's qualities. Were either one to fall short in thought or action of the lofty standard which has helped to kindle the flame of their mutual passion, the other would be disillusioned. The effort needed to follow the path of duty and honour would be greatly reduced and the play itself prove far less interesting. Were Chimène to renounce her attempt to avenge her father's death, Rodrigue would think less highly of her. True, his life would be spared, but she would have suffered in his eyes and become, if not unworthy, at least not vastly different from another girl of comparable beauty and position. In like manner, had Rodrigue declined to take up his father's quarrel, Chimène, while appreciating his motives, would have found it in her heart to despise him. Sainte-Beuve, indeed, argues that Chimène loves Rodrigue, not in spite of the fact that he has killed her father but rather because of it. This is an exaggeration, but it does emphasize the essential point that these two can love only when they also esteem and respect.

Of this couple Rodrigue, in one way, has the easier task. Admittedly the crucial decision at the outset is his. To engage so formidable an opponent as the Count calls for all his physical fortitude. To do so at the cost of grieving his fiancée and jeopardizing, perhaps destroying, his own hopes of happiness requires all his strength of will. But once the duel is over, he is caught up in the swirl of events and can find relief in action. With Chimène it is otherwise. Rodrigue has Don Diègue at his elbow, while she can look for help only to the Infanta, whose counsel, as she recognizes, is far from disinterested. To take the initial step following the death of her father is not so difficult for Chimène as to persevere in her claim for justice against Rodrigue. This is because, with every turn of events, she finds Rodrigue even more worthy of her admiration and hence of her love, so that it becomes all the more difficult for her to plead a cause which in her heart she would fain

lose, could she do so without loss of self-respect and honour. Admiring Chimène and recognizing the rightness of her conduct, Rodrigue supports her in her claim against him, thereby endearing himself to her still further. In their second interview she is constrained at length to confess her love for him, but quickly masters her emotion. Even when she is tricked by the King into admitting her feelings, she still forces herself to renew her pleas. Therein lies her legitimate pride, her *gloire*, and it is only *force majeure*, the intervention of the King, that causes her eventually to yield.

Between such a pair of lovers there is no need for reproaches or recriminations. Both act as honour demands, each is a fitting mate for the other. What they are compelled to do only serves to increase their moral stature and their reciprocal love. Yet neither is unsympathetic or inhuman. In few of Corneille's pieces does love play so large a part. In fewer still does it triumph and yet exalt those who feel its powerful influence. In none is the characterization more satisfying and more subtle or the progress of events so logical and so inevitable.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING AND REFERENCE

### I. THE COMPLETE WORKS OF CORNEILLE

There have been several complete editions of Corneille's works, perhaps the best known being the twelve volumes *Théâtre de P. Corneille*, edited by M. Ch. Marty Laveaux and published by Hachette between 1862 and 1868 in the "Collection des Grands Écrivains de la France." More useful, however, for the ordinary student are collections containing the major and omitting the less important plays. Among such editions are *Théâtre de P. Corneille*, edited by M. Félix Hémon (4 vols., Delagrave 1886-87), and the five-volume edition with a preface by M. Victor Fournel, published by Flammarion. There is also a two-volume edition issued by Garnier.

Commentaries on Corneille's life and works and on aspects of his time are very numerous. These include :

## II. CORNEILLE'S LIFE AND WORKS

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## III. CORNEILLE'S AGE AND BACKGROUND

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LOUIS XIII AT THE THEATRE OF THE PALAIS-ROYAL

*Photo Bibliothèque Nationale*



An oval-shaped library stamp from Madurai University. The text "MADURAI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY" is curved along the top inner edge, and "MADURAI" is printed horizontally across the middle.

# LE CID

## PERSONNAGES

DON FERNAND, premier roi de Castille.

DONA URRAQUE, infante de Castille.

DON DIÈGUE, père de don Rodrigue.

DON GOMÈS, comte de Gormas, père de Chimène.

DON RODRIGUE, amant de Chimène.

DON SANCHE, amoureux de Chimène.

DON ARIAS, } gentilshommes castillans.

DON ALONSE, }

CHIMÈNE, fille de don Gomès.

LÉONOR, gouvernante de l'Infante.

ELVIRE, gouvernante de Chimène.

UN PAGE de l'Infante.

*La scène est à Séville*

# ACTE I

## SCÈNE PREMIÈRE

*Chimène, Elvire*

CHIMÈNE

Elvire, m'as-tu fait un rapport bien sincère ?  
Ne déguises-tu rien de ce qu'a dit mon père ?

ELVIRE

Tous mes sens à moi-même en sont encor charmés :  
Il estime Rodrigue autant que vous l'aimez,  
Et si je ne m'abuse à lire dans son âme,  
Il vous commandera de répondre à sa flamme.

CHIMÈNE

Dis-moi donc, je te prie, une seconde fois  
Ce qui te fait juger qu'il approuve mon choix :  
Apprends-moi de nouveau quel espoir j'en dois prendre ;  
Un si charmant discours ne se peut trop entendre ;  
Tu ne peux trop promettre aux feux de notre amour  
La douce liberté de se montrer au jour.  
Que t'a-t-il répondu sur la secrète brigue  
Que font auprès de toi don Sanche et don Rodrigue ?  
N'as-tu point trop fait voir quelle inégalité  
Entre ces deux amants me penche d'un côté ?

ELVIRE

Non ; j'ai peint votre cœur dans une indifférence  
Qui n'enfle d'aucun d'eux ni détruit l'espérance,  
Et sans les voir d'un œil trop sévère ou trop doux,  
Attend l'ordre d'un père à choisir un époux.  
Ce respect l'a ravi, sa bouche et son visage

M'en ont donné sur l'heure un digne témoignage,  
Et puisqu'il nous en faut encor faire un récit,  
Voici d'eux et de vous ce qu'en hâte il m'a dit :  
" Elle est dans le devoir ; tous deux sont dignes d'elle  
Tous deux formés d'un sang noble, vaillant, fidèle,  
Jeunes, mais qui font lire aisément dans leurs yeux  
L'éclatante vertu de leurs braves aïeux.

Don Rodrigue surtout n'a trait en son visage  
Qui d'un homme de cœur ne soit la haute image,  
Et sort d'une maison si féconde en guerriers  
Qu'ils y prennent naissance au milieu des lauriers.  
La valeur de son père, en son temps sans pareille,  
Tant qu'a duré sa force, a passé pour merveille ;  
Ses rides sur son front ont gravé ses exploits  
Et nous disent encor ce qu'il fut autrefois.

30

Je me promets du fils ce que j'ai vu du père ;  
Et ma fille, en un mot, peut l'aimer et me plaire."

Il allait au conseil, dont l'heure qui pressait  
A tranché ce discours qu'à peine il commençait ;  
Mais à ce peu de mots je crois que sa pensée  
Entre vos deux amants, n'est pas fort balancée.  
Le roi doit à son fils élire un gouverneur,  
Et c'est lui que regarde un tel degré d'honneur :  
Ce choix n'est pas douteux, et sa rare vaillance  
Ne peut souffrir qu'on craigne aucune concurrence.  
Comme ses hauts exploits le rendent sans égal,  
Dans un espoir si juste il sera sans rival ;  
Et puisque don Rodrigue a résolu son père  
Au sortir du conseil à proposer l'affaire,  
Je vous laisse à juger s'il prendra bien son temps,  
Et si tous vos désirs seront bientôt contents.

40

50

CHIMÈNE

Il semble toutefois que mon âme troublée  
Refuse cette joie et s'en trouve accablée :

Un moment donne au sort des visages divers,  
Et dans ce grand bonheur je crains un grand revers.

ELVIRE

Vous verrez cette crainte heureusement déçue.

CHIMÈNE

Allons, quoi qu'il en soit, en attendre l'issue.

## SCÈNE II

*L'Infante, Léonor, Page*

L'INFANTE

Page, allez avertir Chimène de ma part  
Qu'aujourd'hui pour me voir elle attend un peu tard, 60  
Et que mon amitié se plaint de sa paresse. (*Le Page rentre*)

LÉONOR

Madame, chaque jour même désir vous presse ;  
Et dans son entretien je vous vois chaque jour  
Demander en quel point se trouve son amour.

L'INFANTE

Ce n'est pas sans sujet : je l'ai presque forcée  
A recevoir les traits dont son âme est blessée.  
Elle aime don Rodrigue et le tient de ma main,  
Et par moi don Rodrigue a vaincu son dédain :  
Ainsi de ces amants ayant formé les chaînes,  
Je dois prendre intérêt à voir finir leurs peines. 70

LÉONOR

Madame, toutefois parmi leurs bons succès  
Vous montrez un chagrin qui va jusqu'à l'excès.

Cet amour, qui tous deux les comble d'allégresse,  
Fait-il de ce grand cœur la profonde tristesse,  
Et ce grand intérêt que vous prenez pour eux  
Vous rend-il malheureuse alors qu'ils sont heureux ?  
Mais je vais trop avant et deviens indiscrete.

L'INFANTE

Ma tristesse redouble à la tenir secrète.  
Écoute, écoute enfin comme j'ai combattu,  
Écoute quels assauts brave encor ma vertu.

80

L'amour est un tyran qui n'épargne personne :  
Ce jeune cavalier, cet amant que je donne,  
Je l'aime.

LÉONOR

Vous l'aimez !

L'INFANTE

Mets la main sur mon cœur,  
Et vois comme il se trouble au nom de son vainqueur,  
Comme il le reconnaît.

LÉONOR

Pardonnez-moi, madame,  
Si je sors du respect pour blâmer cette flamme.  
Une grande princesse à ce point s'oublier  
Que d'admettre en son cœur un simple cavalier !  
Et que dirait le roi ? que dirait la Castille ?  
Vous souvient-il encor de qui vous êtes fille ?

90

L'INFANTE

Il m'en souvient si bien que j'épandrai mon sang  
Avant que je m'abaisse à démentir mon rang.  
Je te répondrais bien que dans les belles âmes  
Le seul mérite a droit de produire des flammes ;

Et si ma passion cherchait à s'excuser,  
Mille exemples fameux pourraient l'autoriser ;  
Mais je n'en veux point suivre où ma gloire s'engage ;  
La surprise des sens n'abat point mon courage ;  
Et je me dis toujours qu'étant fille de roi,  
Tout autre qu'un monarque est indigne de moi. 100  
Quand je vis que mon cœur ne se pouvait défendre,  
Moi-même, je donnai ce que je n'osais prendre.  
Je mis, au lieu de moi, Chimène en ses liens,  
Et j'allumai leurs feux pour éteindre les miens.  
Ne t'étonne donc plus si mon âme gênée  
Avec impatience attend leur hyménée :  
Tu vois que mon repos en dépend aujourd'hui.  
Si l'amour vit d'espoir, il périt avec lui :  
C'est un feu qui s'éteint, faute de nourriture ;  
Et malgré la rigueur de ma triste aventure, 110  
Si Chimène a jamais Rodrigue pour mari,  
Mon espérance est morte, et mon esprit guéri.

Je souffre cependant un tourment incroyable :  
Jusques à cet hymen Rodrigue m'est aimable ;  
Je travaille à le perdre, et le perds à regret ;  
Et de là prend son cours mon déplaisir secret.  
Je vois avec chagrin que l'amour me contraigne  
A pousser des soupîrs pour ce que je dédaigne ;  
Je sens en deux partis mon esprit divisé :  
Si mon courage est haut, mon cœur est embrasé ; 120  
Cet hymen m'est fatal, je le crains, et souhaite :  
Je n'ose en espérer qu'une joie imparfaite.  
Ma gloire et mon amour ont pour moi tant d'appas  
Que je meurs s'il s'achève ou ne s'achève pas.

## LÉONOR

Madame, après cela je n'ai rien à vous dire,  
Sinon que de vos maux avec vous je soupire ;  
Je vous blâmais tantôt, je vous plains à présent ;

Mais puisque dans un mal si doux et si cuisant  
 Votre vertu combat et son charme et sa force,  
 En repousse l'assaut, en rejette l'amorce,  
 Elle rendra le calme à vos esprits flottants.  
 Espérez donc tout d'elle, et du secours du temps;  
 Espérez tout du ciel : il a trop de justice  
 Pour laisser la vertu dans un si long supplice.

130

L'INFANTE

Ma plus douce espérance est de perdre l'espoir.

LE PAGE

Par vos commandements Chimène vous vient voir.

L'INFANTE, à *Léonor*

Allez l'entretenir en cette galerie.

LÉONOR

Voulez-vous demeurer dedans la rêverie ?

L'INFANTE

Non, je veux seulement, malgré mon déplaisir,  
 Remettre mon visage un peu plus à loisir.

140

Je vous suis. [*Seule*]

Juste ciel, d'où j'attends mon remède,

Mets enfin quelque borne au mal qui me possède :

Assure mon repos, assure mon honneur.

Dans le bonheur d'autrui je cherche mon bonheur :

Cet hyménée à trois également importe ;

Rends son effet plus prompt, ou mon âme plus forte.

D'un lien conjugal joindre ces deux amants,

C'est briser tous mes fers et finir mes tourments.

Mais je tarde un peu trop : allons trouver Chimène

Et par son entretien soulager notre peine.

150

## SCÈNE III

*Le Comte, Don Diègue*

LE COMTE

Enfin vous l'emportez, et la faveur du roi  
 Vous élève en un rang qui n'était dû qu'à moi :  
 Il vous fait gouverneur du prince de Castille.

DON DIÈGUE

Cette marque d'honneur qu'il met dans ma famille  
 Montre à tous qu'il est juste, et fait connaître assez  
 Qu'il sait récompenser les services passés.

LE COMTE

Pour grands que soient les rois, ils sont ce que nous sommes :  
 Ils peuvent se tromper comme les autres hommes ;  
 Et ce choix sert de preuve à tous les courtisans  
 Qu'ils savent mal payer les services présents.

166

DON DIÈGUE

Ne parlons plus d'un choix dont votre esprit s'irrite :  
 La faveur l'a pu faire autant que le mérite ;  
 Mais on doit ce respect au pouvoir absolu  
 De n'examiner rien quand un roi l'a voulu.  
 A l'honneur qu'il m'a fait ajoutez-en un autre ;  
 Joignons d'un sacré nœud ma maison et la vôtre :  
 Vous n'avez qu'une fille, et moi je n'ai qu'un fils,  
 Leur hymen nous peut rendre à jamais plus qu'amis :  
 Faites-nous cette grâce, et l'acceptez pour gendre.

LE COMTE

A des partis plus hauts ce beau fils doit prétendre ;  
 Et le nouvel éclat de votre dignité  
 Lui doit enfler le cœur d'une autre vanité.

170



Exercez-la, monsieur, et gouvernez le prince :  
 Montrez-lui comme il faut régir une province,  
 Faire trembler partout les peuples sous sa loi,  
 Remplir les bons d'amour, et les méchants d'effroi.  
 Joignez à ces vertus celles d'un capitaine.  
 Montrez-lui comme il faut s'endurcir à la peine,  
 Dans le métier de Mars se rendre sans égal,  
 Passer les jours entiers et les nuits à cheval,  
 Reposer tout armé, forcer une muraille,  
 Et ne devoir qu'à soi le gain d'une bataille.  
 Instruisez-le d'exemple, et rendez-le parfait,  
 Expliquant à ses yeux vos leçons par l'effet.

180

DON DIÈGUE

Pour s'instruire d'exemple, en dépit de l'envie,  
 Il lira seulement l'histoire de ma vie.  
 Là, dans un long tissu de belles actions,  
 Il verra comme il faut dompter des nations,  
 Arraquer une place, ordonner une armée,  
 Et sur de grands exploits bâtir sa renommée.

190

LE COMTE

Les exemples vivants sont d'un autre pouvoir ;  
 Un prince dans un livre apprend mal son devoir.  
 Et qu'a fait après tout ce grand nombre d'années  
 Que ne puisse égaler une de mes journées ?  
 Si vous fûtes vaillant, je le suis aujourd'hui,  
 Et ce bras du royaume est le plus ferme appui.  
 Grenade et l'Aragon tremblent quand ce fer brille ;  
 Mon nom sert de rempart à toute la Castille :  
 Sans moi, vous passeriez bientôt sous d'autres lois,  
 Et vous auriez bientôt vos ennemis pour rois.  
 Chaque jour, chaque instant, pour rehausser ma gloire,  
 Met lauriers sur lauriers, victoire sur victoire.

200

Le prince à mes côtés ferait dans les combats  
L'essai de son courage à l'ombre de mon bras ;  
Il apprendrait à vaincre en me regardant faire,  
Et pour répondre en hâte à son grand caractère,  
Il verrait . . .

## DON DIÈGUE

Je le sais, vous servez bien le roi :  
Je vous ai vu combattre et commander sous moi.  
Quand l'âge dans mes nerfs a fait couler sa glace,  
Votre rare valeur a bien rempli ma place ;  
Enfin, pour épargner les discours superflus,  
Vous êtes aujourd'hui ce qu'autrefois je fus.  
Vous voyez toutefois qu'en cette concurrence  
Un monarque entre nous met quelque différence.

210

## LE COMTE

Ce que je méritais, vous l'avez emporté.

## DON DIÈGUE

Qui l'a gagné sur vous l'avait mieux mérité.

## LE COMTE

Qui peut mieux l'exercer en est bien le plus digne.

## DON DIÈGUE

En être refusé n'en est pas un bon signe.

## LE COMTE

Vous l'avez eu par brigue, étant vieux courtisan.

## DON DIÈGUE

L'éclat de mes hauts faits fut mon seul partisan.

220



LE COMTE

*Ton impudence,  
Téméraire vieillard, aura sa récompense.* (Acte I, Scène III)

LE COMTE

Parlons-en mieux, le roi fait honneur à votre âge.

DON DIÈGUE

Le roi, quand il en fait, le mesure au courage.

LE COMTE

Et par là cet honneur n'était dû qu'à mon bras.

DON DIÈGUE

Qui n'a pu l'obtenir ne le méritait pas.

LE COMTE

Ne le méritait pas ! Moi ?

DON DIÈGUE

Vous.

LE COMTE

Ton impudence,  
Téméraire vieillard, aura sa récompense.

[*Il lui donne un soufflet*]

DON DIÈGUE, *mettant l'épée à la main*

Achève et prends ma vie, après un tel affront,  
Le premier dont ma race ait vu rougir son front.

LE COMTE

Et que penses-tu faire avec tant de faiblesse ?

DON DIÈGUE

O Dieu ! ma force usée en ce besoin me laisse !

LE COMTE

Ton épée est à moi ; mais tu serais trop vain  
Si ce honteux trophée avait chargé ma main.

Adieu : fais lire au prince, en dépit de l'envie,  
Pour son instruction, l'histoire de ta vie :  
D'un insolent discours ce juste châtiment  
Ne lui servira pas d'un petit ornement.

SCÈNE IV

*Don Diègne*

Ô rage ! ô désespoir ! ô vieillesse ennemie !  
N'ai-je donc tant vécu que pour cette infamie ?  
Et ne suis-je blanchi dans les travaux guerriers  
Que pour voir en un jour flétrir tant de lauriers ? 240  
Mon bras, qu'avec respect toute l'Espagne admire,  
Mon bras, qui tant de fois a sauvé cet empire,  
Tant de fois affermi le trône de son roi,  
Trahit donc ma querelle et ne fait rien pour moi ?  
Ô cruel souvenir de ma gloire passée !  
Œuvre de tant de jours en un jour effacée !  
Nouvelle dignité, fatale à mon bonheur !  
Précipice élevé d'où tombe mon honneur !  
Faut-il de votre éclat voir triompher le comte,  
Et mourir sans vengeance, ou vivre dans la honte ? 250  
Comte, sois de mon prince à présent gouverneur :  
Ce haut rang n'admet point un homme sans honneur ;  
Et ton jaloux orgueil, par cet affront insigne,  
Malgré le choix du roi, m'en a su rendre indigne.  
Et toi, de mes exploits glorieux instrument,  
Mais d'un corps tout de glace inutile ornement,  
Fer jadis tant à craindre et qui, dans cette offense,  
M'as servi de parade et non pas de défense,  
Va, quitte désormais le dernier des humains,  
Passe, pour me venger, en de meilleures mains. 260

## SCÈNE V

*Don Diègue, Don Rodrigue*

DON DIÈGUE

Rodrigue, as-tu du cœur ?

DON RODRIGUE

Tout autre que mon père  
L'éprouverait sur l'heure.

DON DIÈGUE

Agréable colère !

Digne ressentiment à ma douleur bien doux !

Je reconnais mon sang à ce noble courroux ;

Ma jeunesse revit en cette ardeur si prompt.

Viens, mon fils, viens, mon sang, viens réparer ma honte ;

Viens me venger.

DON RODRIGUE

De quoi ?

DON DIÈGUE

D'un affront si cruel

Qu'à l'honneur de tous deux il porte un coup mortel :

D'un soufflet. L'insolent en eût perdu la vie ;

Mais mon âge a trompé ma généreuse envie :

Et ce fer que mon bras ne peut plus soutenir,

Je le remets au tien pour venger et punir.

Va contre un arrogant éprouver ton courage :

Ce n'est que dans le sang qu'on lave un tel outrage.

Meurs ou tue. Au surplus, pour ne te point flatter,

Je te donne à combattre un homme à redouter :

Je l'ai vu, tout couvert de sang et de poussière,

Porter partout l'effroi dans une armée entière.

J'ai vu par sa valeur cent escadrons rompus,  
Et pour t'en dire encor quelque chose de plus,  
Plus que brave soldat, plus que grand capitaine,  
C'est . . .

280

DON RODRIGUE

De grâce, achevez.

DON DIÈGUE

Le père de Chimène.

DON RODRIGUE

Le . . .

DON DIÈGUE

Ne réplique point, je connais ton amour ;  
Mais qui peut vivre infâme est indigne du jour.  
Plus l'offenseur est cher, et plus grande est l'offense.  
Enfin tu sais l'affront, et tu tiens la vengeance :  
Je ne te dis plus rien. Venge-moi, venge-toi ;  
Montre-toi digne fils d'un père tel que moi.  
Accablé des malheurs où le destin me range,  
Je vais les déplorer : va, cours, vole, et nous venge.

290

## SCÈNE VI

*Don Rodrigue*

Percé jusques au fond du cœur  
D'une atteinte imprévue aussi bien que mortelle,  
Misérable vengeur d'une juste querelle,  
Et malheureux objet d'une injuste rigueur,  
Je demeure immobile, et mon âme abattue  
Cède au coup qui me tue.

Si près de voir mon feu récompensé,  
Ô Dieu, l'étrange peine !  
En cet affront mon père est l'offensé,  
Et l'offenseur le père de Chimène !

300

Que je sens de rudes combats !  
Contre mon propre honneur mon amour s'intéresse :  
Il faut venger un père, et perdre une maîtresse :  
L'un m'anime le cœur, l'autre retient mon bras  
Réduit au triste choix ou de trahir ma flamme,  
Ou de vivre en infâme,  
Des deux côtés mon mal est infini.  
Ô Dieu, l'étrange peine !  
Faut-il laisser un affront impuni ?  
Faut-il punir le père de Chimène ?

310

Père, maîtresse, honneur, amour,  
Noble et dure contrainte, aimable tyrannie,  
Tous mes plaisirs sont morts, ou ma gloire ternie.  
L'un me rend malheureux, l'autre indigne du jour  
Cher et cruel espoir d'une âme généreuse,  
Mais ensemble amoureuse,  
Digne ennemi de mon plus grand bonheur,  
Fer qui causes ma peine,  
M'es-tu donné pour venger mon honneur ?  
M'es-tu donné pour perdre ma Chimène ?

320

Il vaut mieux courir au trépas.  
Je dois à ma maîtresse aussi bien qu'à mon père :  
J'attire en me vengeant sa haine et sa colère ;  
J'attire ses mépris en ne me vengeant pas.  
A mon plus doux espoir l'un me rend infidèle,  
Et l'autre indigne d'elle.  
Mon mal augmente à le vouloir guérir ;  
Tout redouble ma peine.



Allons, mon âme ; et, puisqu'il faut mourir,  
Mourons du moins sans offenser Chimène.

330

Mourir sans tirer ma raison !  
Rechercher un trépas si mortel à ma gloire !  
Endurer que l'Espagne impute à ma mémoire  
D'avoir mal soutenu l'honneur de ma maison !  
Respecter un amour dont mon âme égarée

Voit la perte assurée !

N'écoutons plus ce penser suborneur,

Qui ne sert qu'à ma peine.

Allons, mon bras, sauvons du moins l'honneur,  
Puisqu'après tout il faut perdre Chimène.

340

Oui, mon esprit s'était déçu.

Je dois tout à mon père avant qu'à ma maîtresse.

Que je meure au combat, ou meure de tristesse,

Je rendrai mon sang pur comme je l'ai reçu.

Je m'accuse déjà de trop de négligence :

Courons à la vengeance ;

Et tout honteux d'avoir tant balancé,

Ne soyons plus en peine,

Puisqu'aujourd'hui mon père est l'offensé,

Si l'offenseur est père de Chimène.

350

## ACTE II

### SCÈNE PREMIÈRE

*Don Arias, Le Comte*

LE COMTE

Je l'avoue entre nous, mon sang un peu trop chaud  
S'est trop ému d'un mot et l'a porté trop haut,  
Mais puisque c'en est fait, le coup est sans remède.

DON ARIAS

Qu'aux volontés du roi ce grand courage cède :  
Il y prend grande part, et son cœur irrité  
Agira contre vous de pleine autorité.  
Aussi vous n'avez point de valable défense :  
Le rang de l'offensé, la grandeur de l'offense,  
Demandent des devoirs et des submissions  
Qui passent le commun des satisfactions.

360

LE COMTE

Le roi peut à son gré disposer de ma vie.

DON ARIAS

De trop d'emportement votre faute est suivie.  
Le roi vous aime encore ; apaisez son courroux.  
Il a dit : " Je le veux " ; désobéirez-vous ?

LE COMTE

Monsieur, pour conserver tout ce que j'ai d'estime,  
Désobéir un peu n'est pas un si grand crime ;  
Et quelque grand qu'il soit, mes services présents  
Pour les faire abolir sont plus que suffisants.

DON ARIAS

Quoi qu'on fasse d'illustre et de considérable,  
Jamais à son sujet un roi n'est redevable.  
Vous vous flattez beaucoup, et vous devez savoir  
Que qui sert bien son roi ne fait que son devoir.  
Vous vous perdrez, monsieur, sur cette confiance.

370

LE COMTE

Je ne vous en croirai qu'après l'expérience.

DON ARIAS

Vous devez redouter la puissance d'un roi.

LE COMTE

Un jour seul ne perd pas un homme tel que moi.  
Que toute sa grandeur s'arme pour mon supplice,  
Tout l'État périra, s'il faut que je périsse.

DON ARIAS

Quoi ! vous craignez si peu le pouvoir souverain . . .

LE COMTE

D'un sceptre qui sans moi tomberait de sa main.  
Il a trop d'intérêt lui-même en ma personne,  
Et ma tête en tombant ferait choir sa couronne.

380

DON ARIAS

Souffrez que la raison remette vos esprits.  
Prenez un bon conseil.

LE COMTE

Le conseil en est pris.

DON ARIAS

Que lui dirai-je enfin ? je lui dois rendre conte.

LE COMTE

Que je ne puis du tout consentir à ma honte.

DON ARIAS

Mais songez que les rois veulent être absolus.

LE COMTE

Le sort en est jeté, monsieur, n'en parlons plus.

DON ARIAS

Adieu donc, puisqu'en vain je tâche à vous résoudre :  
Avec tous vos lauriers, craignez encor le foudre.

390

LE COMTE

Je l'attendrai sans peur.

DON ARIAS

Mais non pas sans effet.

LE COMTE

Nous verrons donc par là don Diègue satisfait.

*[Il est seul]*

Qui ne craint point la mort ne craint point les menaces.  
J'ai le cœur au-dessus des plus fières disgrâces ;  
Et l'on peut me réduire à vivre sans bonheur,  
Mais non pas me résoudre à vivre sans honneur.

## SCÈNE II

*Le Comte, Don Rodrigue*

DON RODRIGUE

A moi, comte, deux mots.

LE COMTE

Parle.

DON RODRIGUE

Ôte-moi d'un doute.

Connais-tu bien don Diègue ?

LE COMTE

Oui.

DON RODRIGUE

Parlons bas ; écoute.

Sais-tu que ce vieillard fut la même vertu,  
La vaillance et l'honneur de son temps ? le sais-tu ?

400

LE COMTE

Peut-être.

DON RODRIGUE

Cette ardeur que dans les yeux je porte,  
Sais-tu que c'est son sang, le sais-tu ?

LE COMTE

Que m'importe !

DON RODRIGUE

A quatre pas d'ici je te le fais savoir.

LE COMTE

Jeune présomptueux !

DON RODRIGUE

Parle sans t'émouvoir.

Je suis jeune, il est vrai ; mais aux âmes bien nées  
La valeur n'attend point le nombre des années.

LE COMTE

Te mesurer à moi ! qui t'a rendu si vain,  
Toi qu'on n'a jamais vu les armes à la main ?

DON RODRIGUE

Mes pareils à deux fois ne se font point connaître,  
Et pour leurs coups d'essai veulent des coups de maître. 410

LE COMTE

Sais-tu bien qui je suis ?

DON RODRIGUE

Oui ; tout autre que moi

Au seul bruit de ton nom pourrait trembler d'effroi.  
Les palmes dont je vois ta tête si couverte  
Semblent porter écrit le destin de ma perte.  
J'attaque en téméraire un bras toujours vainqueur ;  
Mais j'aurai trop de force, ayant assez de cœur.  
A qui venge son père il n'est rien impossible.  
Ton bras est vaincu, mais non pas invincible.

LE COMTE

Ce grand cœur qui paraît aux discours que tu tiens  
Par tes yeux, chaque jour, se découvrirait aux miens ; 420  
Et croyant voir en toi l'honneur de la Castille,  
Mon âme avec plaisir te destinait ma fille.  
Je sais ta passion et suis ravi de voir  
Que tous ses mouvements cèdent à ton devoir ;  
Qu'ils n'ont point affaibli cette ardeur magnanime ;  
Que ta haute vertu répond à mon estime ;  
Et que, voulant pour gendre un cavalier parfait,  
Je ne me trompais point au choix que j'avais fait ;  
Mais je sens que pour toi ma pitié s'intéresse ;  
J'admire ton courage, et je plains ta jeunesse. 430  
Ne cherche point à faire un coup d'essai fatal ;  
Dispense ma valeur d'un combat inégal ;  
Trop peu d'honneur pour moi suivrait cette victoire ;  
A vaincre sans péril on triomphe sans gloire.  
On te croirait toujours abattu sans effort ;  
Et j'aurais seulement le regret de ta mort.

DON RODRIGUE

D'une indigne pitié ton audace est suivie :  
Qui m'ose ôter l'honneur craint de m'ôter la vie ?

LE COMTE

Retire-toi d'ici.

DON RODRIGUE

Marchons sans discourir.

LE COMTE

Es-tu si las de vivre ?

DON RODRIGUE

As-tu peur de mourir ?

440

LE COMTE

Viens, tu fais ton devoir, et le fils dégénère  
Qui survit un moment à l'honneur de son père.

### SCÈNE III

*L'Infante, Chimène, Léonor*

L'INFANTE

Apaise, ma Chimène, apaise ta douleur :  
Fais agir ta constance en ce coup de malheur.  
Tu reverras le calme après ce faible orage ;  
Ton bonheur n'est couvert que d'un peu de nuage,  
Et tu n'as rien perdu pour le voir différer.

CHIMÈNE

Mon cœur outré d'ennuis n'ose rien espérer,  
Un orage si prompt qui trouble une bonace  
D'un naufrage certain nous porte la menace :  
Je n'en saurais douter, je pérís dans le port.

450

J'aimais, j'étais aimée, et nos pères d'accord ;  
 Et je vous en contais la charmante nouvelle  
 Au malheureux moment que naissait leur querelle,  
 Dont le récit fatal sitôt qu'on vous l'a fait,  
 D'une si douce attente a ruiné l'effet.

Maudite ambition, détestable manie,  
 Dont les plus généreux souffrent la tyrannie !  
 Honneur impitoyable à mes plus chers désirs,  
 Que tu me vas coûter de pleurs et de soupirs !

460

## L'INFANTE

Tu n'as dans leur querelle aucun sujet de craindre :  
 Un moment l'a fait naître, un moment va l'éteindre.  
 Elle a fait trop de bruit pour ne pas s'accorder  
 Puisque déjà le roi les veut accommoder ;  
 Et tu sais que mon âme, à tes ennuis sensible,  
 Pour en tarir la source y fera l'impossible.

## CHIMÈNE

Les accommodements ne font rien en ce point ;  
 De si mortels affronts ne se réparent point.  
 En vain on fait agir la force ou la prudence :  
 Si l'on guérit le mal, ce n'est qu'en apparence.  
 La haine que les cœurs conservent au dedans  
 Nourrit des feux cachés, mais d'autant plus ardents.

470

## L'INFANTE

Le saint nœud qui joindra don Rodrigue et Chimène  
 Des pères ennemis dissipera la haine ;  
 Et nous verrons bientôt votre amour le plus fort  
 Par un heureux hymen étouffer ce discord.

## CHIMÈNE

Je le souhaite ainsi plus que je ne l'espère :  
 Don Diègue est trop altier, et je connais mon père.  
 Je sens couler des pleurs que je veux retenir ;  
 Le passé me tourmente, et je crains l'avenir.

480



L'INFANTE

Que crains-tu d'un vieillard l'impuissante faiblesse ?

CHIMÈNE

Rodrigue a du courage.

L'INFANTE

Il a trop de jeunesse.

CHIMÈNE

Les hommes valeureux le sont du premier coup.

L'INFANTE

Tu ne dois pas pourtant le redouter beaucoup :  
Il est trop amoureux pour te vouloir déplaire,  
Et deux mots de ta bouche arrêtent sa colère.

CHIMÈNE

S'il ne m'obéit point, quel comble à mon ennui !  
Et s'il peut m'obéir, que dira-t-on de lui ?  
Étant né ce qu'il est, souffrir un tel outrage !  
Soit qu'il cède ou résiste au feu qui me l'engage,  
Mon esprit ne peut qu'être ou honteux ou confus  
De son trop de respect, ou d'un juste refus.

490

L'INFANTE

Chimène a l'âme haute, et, quoique intéressée,  
Elle ne peut souffrir une basse pensée ;  
Mais si jusques au jour de l'accommodement  
Je fais mon prisonnier de ce parfait amant,  
Et que j'empêche ainsi l'effet de son courage,  
Ton esprit amoureux n'aura-t-il point d'ombrage ?

CHIMÈNE

Ah ! madame, en ce cas je n'ai plus de souci.

## SCÈNE IV

*L'Infante, Chimène, Léonor, le Page*

L'INFANTE

Page, cherchez Rodrigue, et l'amenez ici.

500

LE PAGE

Le comte de Gormas et lui

CHIMÈNE

Bon Dieu ! je tremble.

L'INFANTE

Parlez.

LE PAGE

De ce palais ils sont sortis ensemble.

CHIMÈNE

Seuls ?

LE PAGE

Seuls, et qui semblaient tout bas se quereller.

CHIMÈNE

Sans doute ils sont aux mains, il n'en faut plus parler.  
Madame, pardonnez à cette promptitude.

SCÈNE V

*L'Infante, Léonor*

L'INFANTE

Hélas ! que dans l'esprit je sens d'inquiétude !  
Je pleure ses malheurs, son amant me ravit ;  
Mon repos m'abandonne, et ma flamme revit.  
Ce qui va séparer Rodrigue de Chimène  
Fait renaître à la fois mon espoir et ma peine ;  
Et leur division, que je vois à regret,  
Dans mon esprit charmé jette un plaisir secret.

510

LÉONOR

Cette haute vertu qui règne dans votre âme  
Se rend-elle sitôt à cette lâche flamme ?

L'INFANTE

Ne la nomme point lâche, à présent que chez moi,  
Pompeuse et triomphante, elle me fait la loi :  
Porte-lui du respect, puisqu'elle m'est si chère.  
Ma vertu la combat, mais malgré moi j'espère ;  
Et d'un si fol espoir mon cœur mal défendu  
Vole après un amant que Chimène a perdu.

520

LÉONOR

Vous laissez choir ainsi ce glorieux courage,  
Et la raison chez vous perd ainsi son usage ?

L'INFANTE

Ah ! qu'avec peu d'effet on entend la raison  
Quand le cœur est atteint d'un si charmant poison !  
Et lorsque le malade aime sa maladie,  
Qu'il a peine à souffrir que l'on y remédie !

LÉONOR

Votre espoir vous séduit, votre mal vous est doux ;  
Mais enfin ce Rodrigue est indigne de vous.

L'INFANTE

Je ne le sais que trop ; mais si ma vertu cède,  
Apprends comme l'amour flatte un cœur qu'il possède

530

Si Rodrigue une fois sort vainqueur du combat,

Si dessous sa valeur ce grand guerrier s'abat,

Je puis en faire cas, je puis l'aimer sans honte.

Que ne fera-t-il point, s'il peut vaincre le comte ?

J'ose m'imaginer qu'à ses moindres exploits

Les royaumes entiers tomberont sous ses lois ;

Et mon amour flatteur déjà me persuade

Que je le vois assis au trône de Grenade,

Les Maures subjugués trembler en l'adorant,

L'Aragon recevoir ce nouveau conquérant,

540

Le Portugal se rendre, et ses nobles journées

Porter delà les mers ses hautes destinées,

Du sang des Africains arroser ses lauriers :

Enfin tout ce qu'on dit des plus fameux guerriers,

Je l'attends de Rodrigue après cette victoire,

Et fais de son amour un sujet de ma gloire.

LÉONOR

Mais, madame, voyez où vous portez son bras,

Ensuite d'un combat qui peut-être n'est pas.

L'INFANTE

Rodrigue est offensé ; le comte a fait l'outrage ;

Ils sont sortis ensemble : en faut-il davantage ?

550

LÉONOR

Eh bien ! ils se battront, puisque vous le voulez ;

Mais Rodrigue ira-t-il si loin que vous allez ?

L'INFANTE

Que veux-tu ? je suis folle, et mon esprit s'égare :  
Tu vois par là quels maux cet amour me prépare,  
Viens dans mon cabinet consoler mes ennuis,  
Et ne me quitte point dans le trouble où je suis.

SCÈNE VI

*Don Fernand, Don Arias, Don Sanche*

DON FERNAND

Le comte est donc si vain et si peu raisonnable !  
Ose-t-il croire encor son crime pardonnable ?

DON ARIAS

Je l'ai de votre part longtemps entretenu ;  
J'ai fait mon pouvoir, sire, et n'ai rien obtenu.

560

DON FERNAND

Justes cieux ! ainsi donc un sujet téméraire  
A si peu de respect et de soin de me plaire !  
Il offense don Diègue et méprise son roi !  
Au milieu de ma cour il me donne la loi !  
Qu'il soit brave guerrier, qu'il soit grand capitaine,  
Je saurai bien rabattre une humeur si hautaine.  
Fût-il la valeur même, et le dieu des combats,  
Il verra ce que c'est que de n'obéir pas.  
Quoi qu'ait pu mériter une telle insolence,  
Je l'ai voulu d'abord traiter sans violence ;  
Mais puisqu'il en abuse, allez dès aujourd'hui,  
Soit qu'il résiste ou non, vous assurer de lui.

570

DON SANCHE

Peut-être un peu de temps le rendrait moins rebelle :  
On l'a pris tout bouillant encor de sa querelle :

Sire, dans la chaleur d'un premier mouvement,  
Un cœur si généreux se rend malaisément.  
Il voit bien qu'il a tort, mais une âme si haute  
N'est pas sitôt réduite à confesser sa faute.

DON FERNAND

Don Sanche, taisez-vous, et soyez averti  
Qu'on se rend criminel à prendre son parti.

380

DON SANCHE

J'obéis et me tais ; mais de grâce encor, sire,  
Deux mots en sa défense.

DON FERNAND

Et que pourrez-vous dire ?

DON SANCHE

Qu'une âme accoutumée aux grandes actions  
Ne se peut abaisser à des submissions :  
Elle n'en conçoit point qui s'expliquent sans honte ;  
Et c'est à ce mot seul qu'a résisté le comte.  
Il trouve en son devoir un peu trop de rigueur,  
Et vous obéirait s'il avait moins de cœur.  
Commandez que son bras, nourri dans les alarmes,  
Répare cette injure à la pointe des armes ;  
Il satisfera, sire ; et vienne qui voudra,  
Attendant qu'il l'ait su, voici qui répondra.

390

DON FERNAND

Vous perdez le respect ; mais je pardonne à l'âge,  
Et j'excuse l'ardeur en un jeune courage.  
Un roi dont la prudence a de meilleurs objets  
Est meilleur ménager du sang de ses sujets :  
Je veille pour les miens, mes soucis les conservent,  
Comme le chef a soin des membres qui le servent.

Ainsi votre raison n'est pas raison pour moi :  
 Vous parlez en soldat ; je dois agir en roi ;  
 Et quoi qu'on veuille dire, et quoi qu'il ose croire,  
 Le comte à m'obéir ne peut perdre sa gloire.  
 D'ailleurs l'affront me touche : il a perdu d'honneur  
 Celui que de mon fils j'ai fait le gouverneur ;  
 S'attaquer à mon choix, c'est se prendre à moi-même,  
 Et faire un attentat sur le pouvoir suprême.  
 N'en parlons plus. Au reste, on a vu dix vaisseaux  
 De nos vieux ennemis arborer les drapeaux ;  
 Vers la bouche du fleuve ils ont osé paraître.

600

DON ARIAS

Les Maures ont appris par force à vous connaître,  
 Et tant de fois vaincus, ils ont perdu le cœur  
 De se plus hasarder contre un si grand vainqueur.

610

DON FERNAND

Ils ne verront jamais sans quelque jalousie  
 Mon sceptre, en dépit d'eux, régir l'Andalousie ;  
 Et ce pays si beau, qu'ils ont trop possédé,  
 Avec un œil d'envie est toujours regardé.  
 C'est l'unique raison qui m'a fait dans Séville  
 Placer depuis dix ans le trône de Castille,  
 Pour les voir de plus près et d'un ordre plus prompt  
 Renverser aussitôt ce qu'ils entreprendront.

620

DON ARIAS

Ils savent aux dépens de leurs plus dignes têtes.  
 Combien votre présence assure vos conquêtes :  
 Vous n'avez rien à craindre.

DON FERNAND

Et rien à négliger :

Le trop de confiance attire le danger ;

Et vous n'ignorez pas qu'avec fort peu de peine  
Un flux de pleine mer jusqu'ici les amène.  
Toutefois j'aurais tort de jeter dans les cœurs,  
L'avis étant mal sûr, de paniques terreurs.  
L'effroi que produirait cette alarme inutile  
Dans la nuit qui survient troublerait trop la ville :  
Faites doubler la garde aux murs et sur le port.  
C'est assez pour ce soir.

630

## SCÈNE VII

*Don Fernand, Don Sanche, Don Alonse*

DON ALONSE

Sire, le comte est mort :  
Don Diègue, par son fils, a vengé son offense.

DON FERNAND

Dès que j'ai su l'affront, j'ai prévu la vengeance ;  
Et j'ai voulu dès lors prévenir ce malheur.

DON ALONSE

Chimène à vos genoux apporte sa douleur ;  
Elle vient tout en pleurs vous demander justice.

DON FERNAND

Bien qu'à ses déplaisirs mon âme compatisse,  
Ce que le comte a fait semble avoir mérité  
Ce digne châtiment de sa témérité.  
Quelque juste pourtant que puisse être sa peine,  
Je ne puis sans regret perdre un tel capitaine.  
Après un long service à mon État rendu,  
Après son sang pour moi mille fois répandu,  
A quelques sentiments que son orgueil m'oblige,  
Sa perte m'affaiblit, et son trépas m'afflige.

640



SCÈNE VIII

*Don Fernand, Don Diègue, Chimène, Don Sanche, Don Arias,  
Don Alonse*

CHIMÈNE

Sire, sire, justice !

DON DIÈGUE

Ah ! sire, écoutez-nous.

CHIMÈNE

Je me jette à vos pieds.

DON DIÈGUE

J'embrasse vos genoux.

CHIMÈNE

Je demande justice.

DON DIÈGUE

Entendez ma défense.

CHIMÈNE

D'un jeune audacieux punissez l'insolence :  
Il a de votre sceptre abattu le soutien,  
Il a tué mon père.

650

DON DIÈGUE

Il a vengé le sien.

CHIMÈNE

Au sang de ses sujets un roi doit la justice.

DON DIÈGUE

Pour la juste vengeance il n'est point de supplice.

## DON FERNAND

Levez-vous l'un et l'autre, et parlez à loisir.  
 Chimène, je prends part à votre déplaisir ;  
 D'une égale douleur je sens mon âme atteinte.

[*A don Diègue*]

Vous parlerez après : ne troublez pas sa plainte.

## CHIMÈNE

Sire, mon père est mort ; mes yeux ont vu son sang  
 Couler à gros bouillons de son généreux flanc ;  
 Ce sang qui tant de fois garantit vos murailles,  
 Ce sang qui tant de fois vous gagna des batailles,  
 Ce sang qui tout sorti fume encor de courroux  
 De se voir répandu pour d'autres que pour vous,  
 Qu'au milieu des hasards n'osait verser la guerre,  
 Rodrigue en votre cour vient d'en couvrir la terre.  
 J'ai couru sur le lieu, sans force et sans couleur :  
 Je l'ai trouvé sans vie. Excusez ma douleur,  
 Sire, la voix me manque à ce récit funeste ;  
 Mes pleurs et mes soupirs vous diront mieux le reste.

660

670

## DON FERNAND

Prends courage, ma fille, et sache qu'aujourd'hui  
 Ton roi te veut servir de père au lieu de lui.

## CHIMÈNE

Sire, de trop d'honneur ma misère est suivie.  
 Je vous l'ai déjà dit, je l'ai trouvé sans vie ;  
 Son flanc était ouvert ; et, pour mieux m'émouvoir,  
 Son sang sur la poussière écrivait mon devoir ;  
 Ou plutôt sa valeur en cet état réduite  
 Me parlait par sa plaie et hâtait ma poursuite ;  
 Et, pour se faire entendre au plus juste des rois,  
 Par cette triste bouche elle empruntait ma voix.

680

Sire, ne souffrez pas que sous votre puissance  
 Règne devant vos yeux une telle licence ;



CHIMÈNE

*Sire, sire, justice !*

(Acte II, Scène VIII)

Que les plus valeureux, avec impunité,  
Soient exposés aux coups de la témérité ;  
Qu'un jeune audacieux triomphe de leur gloire,  
Se baigne dans leur sang et brave leur mémoire.  
Un si vaillant guerrier qu'on vient de vous ravir  
Éteint, s'il n'est vengé, l'ardeur de vous servir.  
Enfin mon père est mort, j'en demande vengeance,  
Plus pour votre intérêt que pour mon allégeance.  
Vous perdez en la mort d'un homme de son rang :  
Vengez-la par une autre, et le sang par le sang.  
Immolez, non à moi, mais à votre couronne,  
Mais à votre grandeur, mais à votre personne ;  
Immolez, dis-je, sire, au bien de tout l'État  
Tout ce qu'enorgueillit un si haut attentat.

690

DON FERNAND

Don Diègue, répondez.

DON DIÈGUE

Qu'on est digne d'envie

Lorsqu'en perdant la force on perd aussi la vie,  
Et qu'un long âge apprête aux hommes généreux,  
Au bout de leur carrière, un destin malheureux !  
Moi, dont les longs travaux ont acquis tant de gloire,  
Moi, que jadis partout a suivi la victoire,  
Je me vois aujourd'hui, pour avoir trop vécu,  
Recevoir un affront et demeurer vaincu.  
Ce que n'a pu jamais combat, siège, embuscade,  
Ce que n'a pu jamais Aragon ni Grenade,  
Ni tous vos ennemis, ni tous mes envieux,  
Le comte en votre cour l'a fait presque à vos yeux,  
Jaloux de votre choix et fier de l'avantage  
Que lui donnait sur moi l'impuissance de l'âge.

700

Sire, ainsi ces cheveux blanchis sous le harnois,  
Ce sang pour vous servir prodigué tant de fois,

710

Ce bras, jadis l'effroi d'une armée ennemie,  
 Descendaient au tombeau tout chargés d'infamie,  
 Si je n'eusse produit un fils digne de moi,  
 Digne de son pays et digne de son roi.  
 Il m'a prêté sa main, il a tué le comte ;  
 Il m'a rendu l'honneur, il a lavé ma honte.  
 Si montrer du courage et du ressentiment,  
 Si venger un soufflet mérite un châtiment, 720  
 Sur moi seul doit tomber l'éclat de la tempête :  
 Quand le bras a failli, l'on en punit la tête.  
 Qu'on nomme crime ou non ce qui fait nos débats,  
 Sire, j'en suis la tête, il n'en est que le bras.  
 Si Chimène se plaint qu'il a tué son père,  
 Il ne l'eût jamais fait si je l'eusse pu faire.  
 Immolez donc ce chef que les ans vont ravir,  
 Et conservez pour vous le bras qui peut servir.  
 Aux dépens de mon sang satisfaites Chimène :  
 Je n'y résiste point, je consens à ma peine ; 730  
 Et loin de murmurer d'un rigoureux décret,  
 Mourant sans déshonneur, je mourrai sans regret.

DON FERNAND

L'affaire est d'importance, et, bien considérée,  
 Mérite en plein conseil d'être délibérée.

Don Sanche, remettez Chimène en sa maison.  
 Don Diègue aura ma cour et sa foi pour prison.  
 Qu'on me cherche son fils. Je vous ferai justice.

CHIMÈNE

Il est juste, grand roi, qu'un meurtrier périsse.

DON FERNAND

Prends du repos, ma fille, et calme tes douleurs.

CHIMÈNE

M'ordonner du repos, c'est croître mes malheurs.

720

730

740

# ACTE III

## SCÈNE PREMIÈRE

*Don Rodrigue, Elvire*

ELVIRE

Rodrigue, qu'as-tu fait ? où viens-tu, misérable ?

DON RODRIGUE

Suivre le triste cours de mon sort déplorable.

ELVIRE

Où prends-tu cette audace et ce nouvel orgueil  
De paraître en des lieux que tu remplis de deuil ?  
Quoi ? viens-tu jusqu'ici braver l'ombre du comte ?  
Ne l'as-tu pas tué ?

DON RODRIGUE

Sa vie était ma honte :  
Mon honneur de ma main a voulu cet effort.

ELVIRE

Mais chercher ton asile en la maison du mort !  
Jamais un meurtrier en fit-il son refuge ?

DON RODRIGUE

Et je n'y viens aussi que m'offrir à mon juge.  
Ne me regarde plus d'un visage étonné ;  
Je cherche le trépas après l'avoir donné.  
Mon juge est mon amour, mon juge est ma Chimène :  
Je mérite la mort de mériter sa haine,  
Et j'en viens recevoir, comme un bien souverain,  
Et l'arrêt de sa bouche, et le coup de sa main.

750

ELVIRE

Fuis plutôt de ses yeux, fuis de sa violence ;  
A ses premiers transports dérobe ta présence :  
Va, ne t'expose point aux premiers mouvements  
Que poussera l'ardeur de ses ressentiments.

760

DON RODRIGUE

Non, non, ce cher objet à qui j'ai pu déplaire  
Ne peut pour mon supplice avoir trop de colère ;  
Et j'évite cent morts qui me vont accabler,  
Si pour mourir plus tôt je puis la redoubler.

ELVIRE

Chimène est au palais, de pleurs toute baignée,  
Et n'en reviendra point que bien accompagnée.  
Rodrigue, fuis, de grâce : ôte-moi de souci.  
Que ne dira-t-on point si l'on te voit ici ?  
Veux-tu qu'un médisant, pour comble à sa misère,  
L'accuse d'y souffrir l'assassin de son père ?  
Elle va revenir ; elle vient, je la voi :  
Du moins, pour son honneur, Rodrigue, cache-toi.

770

## SCÈNE II

*Don Sanche, Chimène, Elvire*

DON SANCHE

Oui, madame, il vous faut de sanglantes victimes :  
Votre colère est juste, et vos pleurs légitimes ;  
Et je n'entreprends pas, à force de parler,  
Ni de vous adoucir, ni de vous consoler.  
Mais si de vous servir je puis être capable,  
Employez mon épée à punir le coupable ;  
Employez mon amour à venger cette mort :  
Sous vos commandements mon bras sera trop fort.

780

CHIMÈNE

Malheureuse !

DON SANCHE

De grâce, acceptez mon service.

CHIMÈNE

J'offenserais le roi, qui m'a promis justice.

DON SANCHE

Vous savez qu'elle marche avec tant de langueur  
Qu'assez souvent le crime échappe à sa longueur ;  
Son cours lent et douteux fait trop perdre de larmes.  
Souffrez qu'un cavalier vous venge par les armes :  
La voie en est plus sûre, et plus prompte à punir.

CHIMÈNE

C'est le dernier remède, et s'il faut y venir,  
Et que de mes malheurs cette pitié vous dure,  
Vous serez libre alors de venger mon injure.

790

DON SANCHE

C'est l'unique bonheur où mon âme prétend ;  
Et, pouvant l'espérer, je m'en vais trop content.

## SCÈNE III

*Chimène, Elvire*

CHIMÈNE

Enfin je me vois libre, et je puis sans contrainte  
De mes vives douleurs te faire voir l'atteinte.  
Je puis donner passage à mes tristes soupirs ;  
Je puis t'ouvrir mon âme et tous mes déplaisirs.



Mon père est mort, Elvire ; et la première épée  
Dont s'est armé Rodrigue a sa trame coupée.  
Pleurez, pleurez, mes yeux, et fondez-vous en eau !  
La moitié de ma vie a mis l'autre au tombeau  
Et m'oblige à venger, après ce coup funeste,  
Celle que je n'ai plus sur celle qui me reste.

80c

ELVIRE

Reposez-vous, madame.

CHIMÈNE

Ah ! que mal à propos  
Dans un malheur si grand tu parles de repos !  
Par où sera jamais ma douleur apaisée,  
Si je ne puis haïr la main qui l'a causée ?  
Et que dois-je espérer qu'un tourment éternel,  
Si je poursuis un crime, aimant le criminel ?

ELVIRE

Il vous prive d'un père, et vous l'aimez encore !

CHIMÈNE

C'est peu de dire aimer, Elvire : je l'adore ;  
Ma passion s'oppose à mon ressentiment ;  
Dedans mon ennemi je trouve mon amant ;  
Et je sens qu'en dépit de toute ma colère,  
Rodrigue dans mon cœur combat encor mon père :  
Il l'attaque, il le presse, il cède, il se défend,  
Tantôt fort, tantôt faible, et tantôt triomphant ;  
Mais en ce dur combat de colère et de flamme,  
Il déchire mon cœur sans partager mon âme ;  
Et quoi que mon amour ait sur moi de pouvoir,  
Je ne consulte point pour suivre mon devoir :  
Je cours sans balancer où mon honneur m'oblige.  
Rodrigue m'est bien cher, son intérêt m'afflige ;

810

82c

Mon cœur prend son parti ; mais, malgré son effort,  
Je sais ce que je suis, et que mon père est mort.

ELVIRE

Pensez-vous le poursuivre ?

CHIMÈNE

Ah ! cruelle pensée !

Et cruelle poursuite où je me vois forcée !  
Je demande sa tête et crains de l'obtenir :  
Ma mort suivra la sienne, et je le veux punir !

ELVIRE

Quittez, quittez, madame, un dessein si tragique ;  
Ne vous imposez point de loi si tyrannique.

830

CHIMÈNE

Quoi ! mon père étant mort, et presque entre mes bras,  
Son sang crier vengeance, et je ne l'orrai pas !  
Mon cœur, honteusement surpris par d'autres charmes,  
Croira ne lui devoir que d'impuissantes larmes !  
Et je pourrai souffrir qu'un amour suborneur  
Sous un lâche silence étouffe mon honneur !

ELVIRE

Madame, croyez-moi, vous serez excusable  
D'avoir moins de chaleur contre un objet aimable,  
Contre un amant si cher : vous avez assez fait,  
Vous avez vu le roi ; n'en pressez point l'effet,  
Ne vous obstinez point en cette humeur étrange.

840

CHIMÈNE

Il y va de ma gloire, il faut que je me venge ;  
Et de quoi que nous flatte un désir amoureux,  
Toute excuse est honteuse aux esprits généreux.

ELVIRE

Mais vous aimez Rodrigue, il ne vous peut déplaire.

CHIMÈNE

Je l'avoue.

ELVIRE

Après tout, que pensez-vous donc faire ?

CHIMÈNE

Pour conserver ma gloire et finir mon ennui,  
Le poursuivre, le perdre, et mourir après lui.

# SCÈNE IV

*Don Rodrigue, Chimène, Elvire*

DON RODRIGUE

Eh bien ! sans vous donner la peine de poursuivre,  
Assurez-vous l'honneur de m'empêcher de vivre.

850

CHIMÈNE

Elvire, où sommes-nous, et qu'est-ce que je voi ?  
Rodrigue en ma maison ! Rodrigue devant moi !

DON RODRIGUE

N'épargnez point mon sang : goûtez sans résistance  
La douceur de ma perte et de votre vengeance.

CHIMÈNE

Hélas !

DON RODRIGUE

Écoute-moi.

Je me meurs.

DON RODRIGUE

Un moment.

CHIMÈNE

Va, laisse-moi mourir.

DON RODRIGUE

Quatre mots seulement :  
Après ne me réponds qu'avecque cette épée.

CHIMÈNE

Quoi ! du sang de mon père encor toute trempée !

DON RODRIGUE

Ma Chimène . . .

CHIMÈNE

Ôte-moi cet objet odieux,  
Qui reproche ton crime et ta vie à mes yeux.

860

DON RODRIGUE

Regarde-le plutôt pour exciter ta haine,  
Pour croître ta colère et pour hâter ma peine.

CHIMÈNE

Il est teint de mon sang.

DON RODRIGUE

Plonge-le dans le mien,  
Et fais-lui perdre ainsi la teinture du tien.



CHIMÈNE

*Quoi ! du sang de mon père encor toute trempée !*

(Acte III, Scène IV)

## CHIMÈNE

Ah ! quelle cruauté, qui tout en un jour tue ,  
Le père par le fer, la fille par la vue !  
Ôte-moi cet objet, je ne le puis souffrir :  
Tu veux que je t'écoute, et tu me fais mourir !

## DON RODRIGUE

Je fais ce que tu veux, mais sans quitter l'envie  
De finir par tes mains ma déplorable vie ;  
Car enfin n'attends pas de mon affection  
Un lâche repentir d'une bonne action.  
L'irréparable effet d'une chaleur trop prompte  
Deshonorait mon père et me couvrait de honte.  
Tu sais comme un soufflet touche un homme de cœur ;  
J'avais part à l'affront, j'en ai cherché l'auteur :  
Je l'ai vu, j'ai vengé mon honneur et mon père ;  
Je le ferais encor, si j'avais à le faire.  
Ce n'est pas qu'en effet contre mon père et moi  
Ma flamme assez longtemps n'ait combattu pour toi ;  
Juge de son pouvoir : dans une telle offense  
J'ai pu délibérer si j'en prendrais vengeance,  
Réduit à te déplaire, ou souffrir un affront,  
J'ai pensé qu'à son tour mon bras était trop prompt ;  
Je me suis accusé de trop de violence ;  
Et ta beauté sans doute emportait la balance,  
A moins que d'opposer à tes plus forts appas  
Qu'un homme sans honneur ne te méritait pas ;  
Que, malgré cette part que j'avais en ton âme,  
Qui m'aima généreux me haïrait infâme ;  
Qu'écouter ton amour, obéir à sa voix,  
C'était m'en rendre indigne et diffamer ton choix.  
Je te le dis encore ; et quoique j'en soupire,  
Jusqu'au dernier soupir je veux bien le redire :  
Je t'ai fait une offense, et j'ai dû m'y porter  
Pour effacer ma honte et pour te mériter ;

870

880

890

Mais quitte envers l'honneur, et quitte envers mon père,  
C'est maintenant à toi que je viens satisfaire :  
C'est pour t'offrir mon sang qu'en ce lieu tu me vois.  
J'ai fait ce que j'ai dû, je fais ce que je dois.  
Je sais qu'un père mort t'arme contre mon crime ;  
Je ne t'ai pas voulu dérober ta victime :  
Immole avec courage au sang qu'il a perdu  
Celui qui met sa gloire à l'avoir répandu.

900

## CHIMÈNE

Ah ! Rodrigue, il est vrai, quoique ton ennemie,  
Je ne puis te blâmer d'avoir fui l'infamie ;  
Et de quelque façon qu'éclatent mes douleurs,  
Je ne t'accuse point, je pleure mes malheurs.  
Je sais ce que l'honneur, après un tel outrage,  
Demandait à l'ardeur d'un généreux courage :  
Tu n'as fait le devoir que d'un homme de bien ;  
Mais aussi, le faisant, tu m'as appris le mien.  
Ta funeste valeur m'instruit par ta victoire ;  
Elle a vengé ton père et soutenu ta gloire ;  
Même soin me regarde, et j'ai, pour m'affliger,  
Ma gloire à soutenir et mon père à venger.  
Hélas ! ton intérêt ici me désespère :  
Si quelque autre malheur m'avait ravi mon père,  
Mon âme aurait trouvé dans le bien de te voir  
L'unique allégement qu'elle eût pu recevoir ;  
Et contre ma douleur j'aurais senti des charmes  
Quand une main si chère eût essuyé mes larmes.  
Mais il me faut te perdre après l'avoir perdu ;  
Cet effort sur ma flamme à mon honneur est dû ;  
Et cet affreux devoir, dont l'ordre m'assassine,  
Me force à travailler moi-même à ta ruine.  
Car enfin n'attends pas de mon affection  
De lâches sentiments pour ta punition.

910

920

De quoi qu'en ta faveur notre amour m'entretienne,  
Ma générosité doit répondre à la tienne :  
Tu t'es, en m'offensant, montré digne de moi ;  
Je me dois, par ta mort, montrer digne de toi.

930

DON RODRIGUE

Ne diffère donc plus ce que l'honneur t'ordonne :  
Il demande ma tête, et je te l'abandonne ;  
Fais-en un sacrifice à ce noble intérêt :  
Le coup m'en sera doux, aussi bien que l'arrêt.  
Attendre après mon crime une lente justice,  
C'est reculer ta gloire autant que mon supplice.  
Je mourrai trop heureux, mourant d'un coup si beau.

CHIMÈNE

Va, je suis ta partie, et non pas ton bourreau.  
Si tu m'offres ta tête, est-ce à moi de la prendre ?  
Je la dois attaquer, mais tu dois la défendre ;  
C'est d'un autre que toi qu'il me faut l'obtenir,  
Et je dois te poursuivre, et non pas te punir.

940

DON RODRIGUE

De quoi qu'en ma faveur notre amour t'entretienne,  
Ta générosité doit répondre à la mienne ;  
Et pour venger un père emprunter d'autres bras,  
Ma Chimène, crois-moi, c'est n'y répondre pas :  
Ma main seule du mien a su venger l'offense,  
Ta main seule du tien doit prendre la vengeance.

950

CHIMÈNE

Cruel ! à quel propos sur ce point t'obstiner ?  
Tu t'es vengé sans aide, et tu m'en veux donner !  
Je suivrai ton exemple, et j'ai trop de courage  
Pour souffrir qu'avec toi ma gloire se partage.  
Mon père et mon honneur ne veulent rien devoir  
Aux traits de ton amour ni de ton désespoir.



DON RODRIGUE

Rigoureux point d'honneur ! hélas ! quoi que je fasse,  
Ne pourrai-je à la fin obtenir cette grâce ?  
Au nom d'un père mort, ou de notre amitié,  
Punis-moi par vengeance, ou du moins par pitié.  
Ton malheureux amant aura bien moins de peine  
A mourir par ta main qu'à vivre avec ta haine.

960

CHIMÈNE

Va, je ne te hais point.

DON RODRIGUE

Tu le dois.

CHIMÈNE

Je ne puis.

DON RODRIGUE

Crains-tu si peu le blâme, et si peu les faux bruits ?  
Quand on saura mon crime, et que ta flamme dure,  
Que ne publieront point l'envie et l'imposture !  
Force-les au silence, et, sans plus discourir,  
Sauve ta renommée en me faisant mourir.

CHIMÈNE

Elle éclate bien mieux en te laissant la vie ;  
Et je veux que la voix de la plus noire envie  
Élève au ciel ma gloire et plaigne mes ennuis,  
Sachant que je t'adore et que je te poursuis.  
Va-t'en, ne montre plus à ma douleur extrême  
Ce qu'il faut que je perde, encore que je l'aime.  
Dans l'ombre de la nuit cache bien ton départ ;  
Si l'on te voit sortir, mon honneur court hasard.  
La seule occasion qu'aura la médisance,  
C'est de savoir qu'ici j'ai souffert ta présence :  
Ne lui donne point lieu d'attaquer ma vertu.

970

DON RODRIGUE

Que je meure !

980

CHIMÈNE

Va-t'en.

DON RODRIGUE

A quoi te résous-tu ?

CHIMÈNE

Malgré des feux si beaux, qui troublent ma colère,  
Je ferai mon possible à bien venger mon père ;  
Mais, malgré la rigueur d'un si cruel devoir,  
Mon unique souhait est de ne rien pouvoir.

DON RODRIGUE

Ô miracle d'amour !

CHIMÈNE

Ô comble de misères !

DON RODRIGUE

Que de maux et de pleurs nous coûteront nos pères !

CHIMÈNE

Rodrigue, qui l'eût cru ?

DON RODRIGUE

Chimène, qui l'eût dit ?

CHIMÈNE

Que notre heur fût si proche et sitôt se perdît ?

DON RODRIGUE

Et que si près du port, contre toute apparence,  
Un orage si prompt brisât notre espérance ?

990

CHIMÈNE

Ah ! mortelles douleurs !

DON RODRIGUE

Ah ! regrets superflus !

CHIMÈNE

Va-t'en, encore un coup, je ne t'écoute plus.

DON RODRIGUE

Adieu : je vais traîner une mourante vie,  
Tant que par ta poursuite elle me soit ravie.

CHIMÈNE

Si j'en obtiens l'effet, je t'engage ma foi  
De ne respirer pas un moment après toi.  
Adieu : sors, et surtout garde bien qu'on te voie.

ELVIRE

Madame, quelques maux que le ciel nous envoie . . .

CHIMÈNE

Ne m'importune plus, laisse-moi soupirer,  
Je cherche le silence et la nuit pour pleurer.

1000

## SCÈNE V

*Don Diègue*

Jamais nous ne goûtons de parfaite allégresse :  
Nos plus heureux succès sont mêlés de tristesse ;  
Toujours quelques soucis en ces événements  
Troublent la pureté de nos contentements.

Au milieu du bonheur mon âme en sent l'atteinte :  
 Je nage dans la joie, et je tremble de crainte.  
 J'ai vu mort l'ennemi qui m'avait outragé,  
 Et je ne saurais voir la main qui m'a vengé.  
 En vain je m'y travaille, et d'un soin inutile,  
 Tout cassé que je suis, je cours toute la ville :  
 Ce peu que mes vieux ans m'ont laissé de vigueur  
 Se consume sans fruit à chercher ce vainqueur.  
 A toute heure, en tous lieux, dans une nuit si sombre,  
 Je pense l'embrasser et n'embrasse qu'une ombre ;  
 Et mon amour, déçu par cet objet trompeur,  
 Se forme des soupçons qui redoublent ma peur.  
 Je ne découvre point de marques de sa fuite ;  
 Je crains du comte mort les amis et la suite ;  
 Leur nombre m'épouvante et confond ma raison.  
 Rodrigue ne vit plus, ou respire en prison.  
 Justes cieux ! me trompé-je encore à l'apparence,  
 Ou si je vois enfin mon unique espérance ?  
 C'est lui, n'en doutons plus ; mes vœux sont exaucés,  
 Ma crainte est dissipée, et mes ennuis cessés.

1010

1020

## SCÈNE VI

*Don Diègue, Don Rodrigue*

DON DIÈGUE

Rodrigue, enfin le ciel permet que je te voie !

DON RODRIGUE

Hélas !

DON DIÈGUE

Ne mêle point de soupirs à ma joie ;  
 Laisse-moi prendre haleine afin de te louer.

Ma valeur n'a point lieu de te désavouer :  
 Tu l'as bien imitée, et ton illustre audace  
 Fait bien revivre en toi les héros de ma race : 1030  
 C'est d'eux que tu descends, c'est de moi que tu viens :  
 Ton premier coup d'épée égale tous les miens ;  
 Et d'une belle ardeur ta jeunesse animée  
 Par cette grande épreuve atteint ma renommée.  
 Appui de ma vieillesse, et comble de mon heur,  
 Touche ces cheveux blancs à qui tu rends l'honneur,  
 Viens baiser cette joue, et reconnais la place  
 Où fut empreint l'affront que ton courage efface.

DON RODRIGUE

L'honneur vous en est dû : je ne pouvais pas moins,  
 Étant sorti de vous et nourri par vos soins. 1040  
 Je m'en tiens trop heureux, et mon âme est ravie  
 Que mon coup d'essai plaise à qui je dois la vie ;  
 Mais parmi vos plaisirs ne soyez point jaloux.  
 Si je m'ose à mon tour satisfaire après vous,  
 Souffrez qu'en liberté mon désespoir éclate ;  
 Assez et trop longtemps votre discours le flatte.  
 Je ne me repens point de vous avoir servi ;  
 Mais rendez-moi le bien que ce coup m'a ravi.  
 Mon bras, pour vous venger, armé contre ma flamme,  
 Par ce coup glorieux m'a privé de mon âme ; 1050  
 Ne me dites plus rien ; pour vous j'ai tout perdu :  
 Ce que je vous devais, je vous l'ai bien rendu.

DON DIÈGUE

Porte, porte plus haut le fruit de ta victoire ;  
 Je t'ai donné la vie, et tu me rends ma gloire ;  
 Et d'autant que l'honneur m'est plus cher que le jour,  
 D'autant plus maintenant je te dois de retour.  
 Mais d'un cœur magnanime éloigne ces faiblesses,  
 Nous n'avons qu'un honneur, il est tant de maîtresses !  
 L'amour n'est qu'un plaisir, l'honneur est un devoir.

DON RODRIGUE

Ah ! que me dites-vous ?

1060

DON DIÈGUE

Ce que tu dois savoir.

DON RODRIGUE

Mon honneur offensé sur moi-même se venge ;  
Et vous m'osez pousser à la honte du change !  
L'infamie est pareille et suit également  
Le guerrier sans courage et le perfide amant.  
A ma fidélité ne faites point d'injure ;  
Souffrez-moi généreux sans me rendre parjure :  
Mes liens sont trop forts pour être ainsi rompus ;  
Ma foi m'engage encor si je n'espère plus ;  
Et ne pouvant quitter ni posséder Chimène,  
Le trépas que je cherche est ma plus douce peine.

1070

DON DIÈGUE

Il n'est pas temps encor de chercher le trépas :  
Ton prince et ton pays ont besoin de ton bras.  
La flotte qu'on craignait, dans ce grand fleuve entrée,  
Croit surprendre la ville et piller la contrée.  
Les Maures vont descendre, et le flux et la nuit  
Dans une heure à nos murs les amène sans bruit.  
La cour est en désordre, et le peuple en alarmes :  
On n'entend que des cris, on ne voit que des larmes.  
Dans ce malheur public mon bonheur a permis  
Que j'ai trouvé chez moi cinq cents de mes amis,  
Qui sachant mon affront, poussés d'un même zèle,  
Se venaient tous offrir à venger ma querelle.  
Tu les as prévenus ; mais leurs vaillantes mains  
Se tremperont bien mieux au sang des Africains.  
Va marcher à leur tête où l'honneur te demande :  
C'est toi que veut pour chef leur généreuse bande.

1080

De ces vieux ennemis va soutenir l'abord :  
 Là, si tu veux mourir, trouve une belle mort ;  
 Prends-en l'occasion, puisqu'elle t'est offerte ;  
 Fais devoir à ton roi son salut à ta perte ;  
 Mais reviens-en plutôt les palmes sur le front.  
 Ne borne pas ta gloire à venger un affront ;  
 Porte-la plus avant : force par ta vaillance  
 Ce monarque au pardon, et Chimène au silence ;  
 Si tu l'aimes, apprends que revenir vainqueur,  
 C'est l'unique moyen de regagner son cœur.  
 Mais le temps est trop cher pour le perdre en paroles ;  
 Je t'arrête en discours, et je veux que tu voles !  
 Viens, suis-moi, va combattre et montrer à ton roi  
 Que ce qu'il perd au comte il le recouvre en toi.

1090

1106

# ACTE IV

## SCÈNE PREMIÈRE

*Chimène, Elvire*

CHIMÈNE

N'est-ce point un faux bruit ? le sais-tu bien, Elvire ?

ELVIRE

Vous ne croiriez jamais comme chacun l'admire  
Et porte jusqu'au ciel, d'une commune voix,  
De ce jeune héros les glorieux exploits.  
Les Maures devant lui n'ont paru qu'à leur honte ;  
Leur abord fut bien prompt, leur fuite encor plus prompte.  
Trois heures de combat laissent à nos guerriers  
Une victoire entière et deux rois prisonniers.  
La valeur de leur chef ne trouvait point d'obstacles.

CHIMÈNE

Et la main de Rodrigue a fait tous ces miracles ?

1110

ELVIRE

De ses nobles efforts ces deux rois sont le prix :  
Sa main les a vaincus, et sa main les a pris.

CHIMÈNE

De qui peux-tu savoir ces nouvelles étranges ?

ELVIRE

Du peuple, qui partout fait sonner ses louanges,  
Le nomme de sa joie et l'objet et l'auteur,  
Son ange tutélaire, et son libérateur.



CHIMÈNE

Et le roi, de quel œil voit-il tant de vaillance ?

ELVIRE

Rodrigue n'ose encor paraître en sa présence ;  
Mais don Diègue ravi lui présente enchaînés,  
Au nom de ce vainqueur, ces captifs couronnés,  
Et demande pour grâce à ce généreux prince  
Qu'il daigne voir la main qui sauve la province.

1120

CHIMÈNE

Mais n'est-il point blessé ?

ELVIRE

Je n'en ai rien appris.

Vous changez de couleur ! reprenez vos esprits.

CHIMÈNE

Reprenons donc aussi ma colère affaiblie :  
Pour avoir soin de lui faut-il que je m'oublie ?  
On le vante, on le loue, et mon cœur y consent !  
Mon honneur est muet, mon devoir impuissant !  
Silence, mon amour, laisse agir ma colère :  
S'il a vaincu deux rois, il a tué mon père ;  
Ces tristes vêtements, où je lis mon malheur,  
Sont les premiers effets qu'ait produits sa valeur ;  
Et quoi qu'on die ailleurs d'un cœur si magnanime,  
Ici tous les objets me parlent de son crime.

1130

Vous qui rendez la force à mes ressentiments,  
Voile, crêpes, habits, lugubres ornements,  
Pompe que me prescrit sa première victoire,  
Contre ma passion soutenez bien ma gloire ;  
Et, lorsque mon amour prendra trop de pouvoir,  
Parlez à mon esprit de mon triste devoir,  
Attaquez sans rien craindre une main triomphante.

1140

Modérez ces transports, voici venir l'infante.

## SCÈNE II

*L'Infante, Chimène, Léonor, Elvire*

L'INFANTE

Je ne viens pas ici consoler tes douleurs ;  
Je viens plutôt mêler mes soupirs à tes pleurs.

CHIMÈNE

Prenez bien plutôt part à la commune joie,  
Et goûtez le bonheur que le ciel vous envoie,  
Madame : autre que moi n'a droit de soupirer.  
Le péril dont Rodrigue a su nous retirer,  
Et le salut public que vous rendent ses armes,  
A moi seule aujourd'hui souffrent encor les larmes :  
Il a sauvé la ville, il a servi son roi ;  
Et son bras valeureux n'est funeste qu'à moi.

1150

L'INFANTE

Ma Chimène, il est vrai qu'il a fait des merveilles.

CHIMÈNE

Déjà ce bruit fâcheux a frappé mes oreilles ;  
Et je l'entends partout publier hautement  
Aussi brave guerrier que malheureux amant.

L'INFANTE

Qu'a de fâcheux pour toi ce discours populaire ?  
Ce jeune Mars qu'il loue a su jadis te plaire :  
Il possédait ton âme, il vivait sous tes lois ;  
Et vanter sa valeur, c'est honorer ton choix.

1160



57999

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CTE IV, SCÈNE II

59

CHIMÈNE

Chacun peut la vanter avec quelque justice ;  
 Mais pour moi sa louange est un nouveau supplice.  
 On aigrit ma douleur en l'élevant si haut :  
 Je vois ce que je perds quand je vois ce qu'il vaut.  
 Ah ! cruels dé plaisirs à l'esprit d'une amante !  
 Plus j'apprends son mérite, et plus mon feu s'augmente :  
 Cependant mon devoir est toujours le plus fort  
 Et, malgré mon amour, va poursuivre sa mort.

L'INFANTE

Hier ce devoir te mit en une haute estime ;  
 L'effort que tu te fis parut si magnanime,  
 Si digne d'un grand cœur, que chacun à la cour  
 Admirait ton courage et plaignait ton amour.  
 Mais croirais-tu l'avis d'une amitié fidèle ?

1170

CHIMÈNE

Ne vous obéir pas me rendrait criminelle.

L'INFANTE

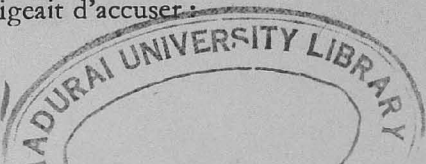
Ce qui fut juste alors ne l'est plus aujourd'hui.  
 Rodrigue maintenant est notre unique appui,  
 L'espérance et l'amour d'un peuple qui l'adore,  
 Le soutien de Castille, et la terreur du Maure,  
 Le roi même est d'accord de cette vérité,  
 Que ton père en lui seul se voit ressuscité ;  
 Et si tu veux enfin qu'en deux mots je m'explique,  
 Tu poursuis en sa mort la ruine publique.  
 Quoi ! pour venger un père est-il jamais permis  
 De livrer sa patrie aux mains des ennemis ?  
 Contre nous ta poursuite est-elle légitime,  
 Et pour être punis avons-nous part au crime ?  
 Ce n'est pas qu'après tout tu doives épouser  
 Celui qu'un père mort t'obligeait d'accuser :

1180

57999

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Je te voudrais moi-même en arracher l'envie ;  
Ôte-lui ton amour, mais laisse-nous sa vie.

1190

## CHIMÈNE

Ah ! ce n'est pas à moi d'avoir tant de bonté ;  
Le devoir qui m'aigrit n'a rien de limité.  
Quoique pour ce vainqueur mon amour s'intéresse,  
Quoiqu'un peuple l'adore et qu'un roi le caresse,  
Qu'il soit environné des plus vaillants guerriers,  
J'irai sous mes cyprès accabler ses lauriers.

## L'INFANTE

C'est générosité quand pour venger un père  
Notre devoir attaque une tête si chère ;  
Mais c'en est une encor d'un plus illustre rang  
Quand on donne au public les intérêts du sang.  
Non, crois-moi, c'est assez que d'éteindre ta flamme ;  
Il sera trop puni s'il n'est plus dans ton âme.  
Que le bien du pays t'impose cette loi :  
Aussi bien, que crois-tu que t'accorde le roi ?

1200

## CHIMÈNE

Il peut me refuser, mais je ne puis me taire.

## L'INFANTE

Pense bien, ma Chimène, à ce que tu veux faire.  
Adieu : tu pourras seule y penser à loisir.

## CHIMÈNE

Après mon père mort, je n'ai point à choisir.

SCÈNE III

*Don Fernand, Don Diègue, Don Arias, Don Rodrigue,  
Don Sanche*

DON FERNAND

Généreux héritier d'une illustre famille  
Qui fut toujours la gloire et l'appui de Castille, 1215  
Race de tant d'aïeux en valeur signalés,  
Que l'essai de la tienne a sitôt égalés,  
Pour te récompenser ma force est trop petite ;  
Et j'ai moins de pouvoir que tu n'as de mérite.  
Le pays délivré d'un si rude ennemi,  
Mon sceptre dans ma main par la tienne affermi,  
Et les Maures défaits avant qu'en ces alarmes  
J'eusse pu donner ordre à repousser leurs armes,  
Ne sont point des exploits qui laissent à ton roi  
Le moyen ni l'espoir de s'acquitter vers toi. 1225  
Mais deux rois tes captifs feront ta récompense :  
Ils t'ont nommé tous deux leur Cid en ma présence ;  
Puisque Cid en leur langue est autant que seigneur,  
Je ne t'envierai pas ce beau titre d'honneur.

Sois désormais le Cid : qu'à ce grand nom tout cède ;  
Qu'il comble d'épouvante et Grenade et Tolède ;  
Et qu'il marque à tous ceux qui vivent sous mes lois  
Et ce que tu me vaux, et ce que je te dois.

DON RODRIGUE

Que Votre Majesté, sire, épargne ma honte ;  
D'un si faible service elle fait trop de conte, 1230  
Et me force à rougir devant un si grand roi  
De mériter si peu l'honneur que j'en reçois.  
Je sais trop que je dois au bien de votre empire  
Et le sang qui m'anime, et l'air que je respire,  
Et quand je les perdrai pour un si digne objet,  
Je ferai seulement le devoir d'un sujet.

## DON FERNAND

Tous ceux que ce devoir à mon service engage  
 Ne s'en acquittent pas avec même courage ;  
 Et lorsque la valeur ne va point dans l'excès,  
 Elle ne produit point de si rares succès.  
 Souffre donc qu'on te loue, et de cette victoire  
 Apprends-moi plus au long la véritable histoire.

1240

## DON RODRIGUE

Sire, vous avez su qu'en ce danger pressant,  
 Qui jeta dans la ville un effroi si puissant,  
 Une troupe d'amis chez mon père assemblée  
 Sollicita mon âme encor toute troublée . . .  
 Mais, sire, pardonnez à ma témérité,  
 Si j'osai l'employer sans votre autorité :  
 Le péril approchait ; leur brigade était prête ;  
 Me montrant à la cour, je hasardais ma tête ;  
 Et s'il fallait la perdre, il m'était bien plus doux  
 De sortir de la vie en combattant pour vous.

1250

## DON FERNAND

J'excuse ta chaleur à venger ton offense ;  
 Et l'État défendu me parle en ta défense :  
 Crois que dorénavant Chimène a beau parler,  
 Je ne l'écoute plus que pour la consoler.  
 Mais poursuis.

## DON RODRIGUE

Sous moi donc cette troupe s'avance,  
 Et porte sur le front une mâle assurance.  
 Nous partîmes cinq cents ; mais par un prompt renfort  
 Nous nous vîmes trois mille en arrivant au port,  
 Tant, à nous voir marcher avec un tel visage,

1260

Les plus épouvantés reprenaient de courage !  
 J'en cache les deux tiers, aussitôt qu'arrivés,  
 Dans le fond des vaisseaux qui lors furent trouvés ;  
 Le reste, dont le nombre augmentait à toute heure,  
 Brûlant d'impatience, autour de moi demeure,  
 Se couche contre terre et, sans faire aucun bruit,  
 Passe une bonne part d'une si belle nuit.  
 Par mon commandement la garde en fait de même  
 Et, se tenant cachée, aide à mon stratagème ;  
 Et je feins hardiment d'avoir reçu de vous  
 L'ordre qu'on me voit suivre et que je donne à tous.

1270

Cette obscure clarté qui tombe des étoiles  
 Enfin avec le flux nous fait voir trente voiles ;  
 L'onde s'enfle dessous, et d'un commun effort  
 Les Maures et la mer montent jusques au port.  
 On les laisse passer ; tout leur paraît tranquille ;  
 Point de soldats au port, point aux murs de la ville.

Notre profond silence abusant leurs esprits,  
 Ils n'osent plus douter de nous avoir surpris ;  
 Ils abordent sans peur, ils ancrent, ils descendent  
 Et courent se livrer aux mains qui les attendent.  
 Nous nous levons alors, et tous en même temps  
 Poussons jusques au ciel mille cris éclatants.

1280

Les nôtres, à ces cris, de nos vaisseaux répondent ;  
 Ils paraissent armés, les Maures se confondent,  
 L'épouvante les prend à demi descendus ;  
 Avant que de combattre ils s'estiment perdus.  
 Ils couraient au pillage, et rencontrent la guerre ;  
 Nous les pressons sur l'eau, nous les pressons sur terre,  
 Et nous faisons courir des ruisseaux de leur sang,  
 Avant qu'aucun résiste ou reprenne son rang.

1290

Mais bientôt, malgré nous, leurs princes les rallient,  
 Leur courage renaît, et leurs terreurs s'oublient.  
 La honte de mourir sans avoir combattu  
 Arrête leur désordre et leur rend leur vertu.

Contre nous de pied ferme ils tirent leurs alfanges,  
De notre sang au leur font d'horribles mélanges ;  
Et la terre, et le fleuve, et leur flotte, et le port,  
Sont des champs de carnage, où triomphe la mort.

1300

Ô combien d'actions, combien d'exploits célèbres  
Sont demeurés sans gloire au milieu des ténèbres,  
Où chacun, seul témoin des grands coups qu'il donnait,  
Ne pouvait discerner où le sort inclinait !

J'allais de tous côtés encourager les nôtres,  
Faire avancer les uns et soutenir les autres,  
Ranger ceux qui venaient, les pousser à leur tour,  
Et ne l'ai pu savoir jusques au point du jour.

Mais enfin sa clarté montre notre avantage ;  
Le Maure voit sa perte et perd soudain courage,

1310

Et, voyant un renfort qui nous vient secourir,  
L'ardeur de vaincre cède à la peur de mourir,  
Ils gagnent leurs vaisseaux, ils en coupent les câbles,  
Poussent jusques aux cieux des cris épouvantables,  
Font retraite en tumulte et sans considérer

Si leurs rois avec eux peuvent se retirer.

Pour souffrir ce devoir leur frayeur est trop forte :

Le flux les apporta ; le reflux les remporte,

Cependant que leurs rois, engagés parmi nous,

Et quelque peu des leurs, tous percés de nos coups,

1320

Disputent vaillamment et vendent bien leur vie.

A se rendre moi-même en vain je les convie :

Le cimeterre au poing, ils ne m'écoutent pas ;

Mais voyant à leurs pieds tomber tous leurs soldats,

Et que seuls désormais en vain ils se défendent,

Ils demandent le chef : je me nomme, ils se rendent.

Je vous les envoyai tous deux en même temps ;

Et le combat cessa faute de combattants.

C'est de cette façon que, pour votre service . . .



SCÈNE IV

*Don Fernand, Don Diègue, Don Rodrigue, Don Arias,  
Don Alonse, Don Sanche*

DON ALONSE

Sire, Chimène vient vous demander justice.

1330

DON FERNAND

La fâcheuse nouvelle, et l'importun devoir !  
Va, je ne la veux pas obliger à te voir.  
Pour tous remerciements il faut que je te chasse ;  
Mais, avant que sortir, viens, que ton roi t'embrasse.  
[*Don Rodrigue rentre*]

DON DIÈGUE

Chimène le poursuit, et voudrait le sauver.

DON FERNAND

On m'a dit qu'elle l'aime, et je vais l'éprouver.  
Montrez un œil plus triste.

SCÈNE V

*Don Fernand, Don Diègue, Don Arias, Don Sanche,  
Don Alonse, Chimène, Elvire*

DON FERNAND

Enfin, soyez contente,  
Chimène, le succès répond à votre attente :  
Si de nos ennemis Rodrigue a le dessus,  
Il est mort à nos yeux des coups qu'il a reçus ;  
Rendez grâces au ciel, qui vous en a vengée.  
[*A don Diègue*]  
Voyez comme déjà sa couleur est changée.

1340

DON DIÈGUE

Mais voyez qu'elle pâme, et d'un amour parfait,  
Dans cette pâmoison, sire, admirez l'effet.  
Sa douleur a trahi les secrets de son âme,  
Et ne vous permet plus de douter de sa flamme.

CHIMÈNE

Quoi ! Rodrigue est donc mort ?

DON FERNAND

Non, non, il voit le jour,  
Et te conserve encore un immuable amour :  
Calme cette douleur qui pour lui s'intéresse.

CHIMÈNE

Sire, on pâme de joie, ainsi que de tristesse :  
Un excès de plaisir nous rend tous languissants,  
Et quand il surprend l'âme, il accable les sens. 1350

DON FERNAND

Tu veux qu'en ta faveur nous croyions l'impossible ?  
Chimène, ta douleur a paru trop visible.

CHIMÈNE

Eh bien ! sire, ajoutez ce comble à mon malheur,  
Nommez ma pâmoison l'effet de ma douleur :  
Un juste déplaisir à ce point m'a réduite.  
Son trépas dérobait sa tête à ma poursuite ;  
S'il meurt des coups reçus pour le bien du pays,  
Ma vengeance est perdue et mes desseins trahis :  
Une si belle fin m'est trop injurieuse. 1360  
Je demande sa mort, mais non pas glorieuse,  
Non pas dans un éclat qui l'élève si haut,  
Non pas au lit d'honneur, mais sur un échafaud ;

Qu'il meure pour mon père, et non pour la patrie ;  
 Que son nom soit taché, sa mémoire flétrie.  
 Mourir pour le pays n'est pas un triste sort ;  
 C'est s'immortaliser par une belle mort.

J'aime donc sa victoire, et je le puis sans crime ;  
 Elle assure l'État et me rend ma victime,  
 Mais noble, mais fameuse entre tous les guerriers,  
 Le chef, au lieu de fleurs, couronné de lauriers ;  
 Et pour dire en un mot ce que j'en considère,  
 Digne d'être immolée aux mânes de mon père . . .

1370

Hélas ! à quel espoir me laissé-je emporter !  
 Rodrigue de ma part n'a rien à redouter :  
 Que pourraient contre lui des larmes qu'on méprise ?  
 Pour lui tout votre empire est un lieu de franchise ;  
 Là, sous votre pouvoir, tout lui devient permis ;  
 Il triomphe de moi comme des ennemis.  
 Dans leur sang répandu la justice étouffée  
 Au crime du vainqueur sert d'un nouveau trophée ;  
 Nous en croissons la pompe, et le mépris des lois  
 Nous fait suivre son char au milieu de deux rois.

1380

DON FERNAND

Ma fille, ces transports ont trop de violence.  
 Quand on rend la justice, on met tout en balance ;  
 On a tué ton père, il était l'agresseur ;  
 Et la même équité m'ordonne la douceur.  
 Avant que d'accuser ce que j'en fais paraître,  
 Consulte bien ton cœur : Rodrigue en est le maître,  
 Et ta flamme en secret rend grâces à ton roi,  
 Dont la faveur conserve un tel amant pour toi.

1390

CHIMÈNE

Pour moi ! mon ennemi ! l'objet de ma colère !  
 L'auteur de mes malheurs ! l'assassin de mon père

De ma juste poursuite on fait si peu de cas  
Qu'on me croit obliger en ne m'écoutant pas !

Puisque vous refusez la justice à mes larmes,  
Sire, permettez-moi de recourir aux armes,  
C'est par là seulement qu'il a su m'outrager,  
Et c'est aussi par là que je me dois venger.

1400

A tous vos cavaliers je demande sa tête :

Oui, qu'un d'eux me l'apporte, et je suis sa conquête ;  
Qu'ils le combattent, sire, et, le combat fini,  
J'épouse le vainqueur, si Rodrigue est puni.  
Sous votre autorité souffrez qu'on le publie.

#### DON FERNAND

Cette vieille coutume en ces lieux établie,  
Sous couleur de punir un injuste attentat,  
Des meilleurs combattants affaiblit un État ;  
Souvent de cet abus le succès déplorable  
Opprime l'innocent et soutient le coupable.  
J'en dispense Rodrigue ; il m'est trop précieux  
Pour l'exposer aux coups d'un sort capricieux ;  
Et quoi qu'ait pu commettre un cœur si magnanime,  
Les Maures en fuyant ont emporté son crime.

1410

#### DON DIÈGUE

Quoi ! sire, pour lui seul vous renversez des lois  
Qu'a vu toute la cour observer tant de fois !  
Que croira votre peuple et que dira l'envie,  
Si sous votre défense il ménage sa vie  
Et s'en fait un prétexte à ne paraître pas  
Où tous les gens d'honneur cherchent un beau trépas ?  
De pareilles faveurs terniraient trop sa gloire :  
Qu'il goûte sans rougir les fruits de sa victoire.  
Le comte eut de l'audace ; il l'en a su punir :  
Il l'a fait en brave homme, et le doit maintenir.

1420

DON FERNAND

Puisque vous le voulez, j'accorde qu'il le fasse,  
Mais d'un guerrier vaincu mille prendraient la place,  
Et le prix que Chimène au vainqueur a promis  
De tous mes cavaliers ferait ses ennemis.  
L'opposer seul à tous serait trop d'injustice :  
Il suffit qu'une fois il entre dans la lice.

1430

Choisis qui tu voudras, Chimène, et choisis bien ;  
Mais après ce combat ne demande plus rien.

DON DIÈGUE

N'excusez point par là ceux que son bras étonne.  
Laissez un champ ouvert, où n'entrera personne.  
Après ce que Rodrigue a fait voir aujourd'hui,  
Quel courage assez vain s'oserait prendre à lui ?  
Qui se hasarderait contre un tel adversaire ?  
Qui serait ce vaillant, ou bien ce téméraire ?

DON SANCHE

Faites ouvrir le champ : vous voyez l'assaillant ;  
Je suis ce téméraire, ou plutôt ce vaillant.

1440

Accordez cette grâce à l'ardeur qui me presse,  
Madame : vous savez quelle est votre promesse.

DON FERNAND

Chimène, remets-tu ta querelle en sa main ?

CHIMÈNE

Sire, je l'ai promis.

DON FERNAND

Soyez prêt à demain.

DON DIÈGUE

Non sire, il ne faut pas différer davantage :  
On est toujours trop prêt quand on a du courage.

DON FERNAND

Sortir d'une bataille, et combattre à l'instant !

DON DIÈGUE

Rodrigue a pris haleine en vous la racontant.

DON FERNAND

Du moins une heure ou deux je veux qu'il se délasse.  
Mais de peur qu'en exemple un tel combat ne passe,  
Pour témoigner à tous qu'à regret je permets  
Un sanglant procédé qui ne me plut jamais,  
De moi ni de ma cour il n'aura la présence.

1450

*[Il parle à don Arias]*

Vous seul des combattants jugerez la vaillance :  
Ayez soin que tous deux fassent en gens de cœur,  
Et, le combat fini, m'amenez le vainqueur.  
Qui qu'il soit, même prix est acquis à sa peine :  
Je le veux de ma main présenter à Chimène,<sup>1</sup>  
Et que pour récompense il reçoive sa foi.

CHIMÈNE

Quoi ! sire, m'imposer une si dure loi !

1460

DON FERNAND

Tu t'en plains ; mais ton feu, loin d'avouer ta plainte,  
Si Rodrigue est vainqueur, l'accepte sans contrainte.  
Cesse de murmurer contre un arrêt si doux :  
Qui que ce soit des deux, j'en ferai ton époux.

## ACTE V

### SCÈNE PREMIÈRE

*Don Rodrigue, Chimène*

CHIMÈNE

Quoi ! Rodrigue, en plein jour ! d'où te vient cette audace ?  
Va, tu me perds d'honneur ; retire-toi, de grâce.

DON RODRIGUE

Je vais mourir, madame, et vous viens en ce lieu,  
Avant le coup mortel, dire un dernier adieu ;  
Cet immuable amour qui sous vos lois m'engage  
N'ose accepter ma mort sans vous en faire hommage.

147c

CHIMÈNE

Tu vas mourir !

DON RODRIGUE

Je cours à ces heureux moments  
Qui vont livrer ma vie à vos ressentiments.

CHIMÈNE

Tu vas mourir ! Don Sanche est-il si redoutable  
Qu'il donne l'épouvante à ce cœur indomptable ?  
Qui t'a rendu si faible, ou qui le rend si fort ?  
Rodrigue va combattre et se croit déjà mort !  
Celui qui n'a pas craint les Maures, ni mon père,  
Va combattre don Sanche, et déjà désespère !  
Ainsi donc au besoin ton courage s'abat !

## DON RODRIGUE

Je cours à mon supplice, et non pas au combat ; 1480  
Et ma fidèle ardeur sait bien m'ôter l'envie,  
Quand vous cherchez ma mort, de défendre ma vie.

J'ai toujours même cœur ; mais je n'ai point de bras  
Quand il faut conserver ce qui ne vous plaît pas ;  
Et déjà cette nuit m'aurait été mortelle  
Si j'eusse combattu pour ma seule querelle ;  
Mais défendant mon roi, son peuple et mon pays,  
A me défendre mal je les aurais trahis.  
Mon esprit généreux ne hait pas tant la vie  
Qu'il en veuille sortir par une perfidie. 1490  
Maintenant qu'il s'agit de mon seul intérêt,  
Vous demandez ma mort, j'en accepte l'arrêt.  
Votre ressentiment choisit la main d'un autre  
(Je ne méritais pas de mourir de la vôtre) :  
On ne me verra point en repousser les coups ;  
Je dois plus de respect à qui combat pour vous ;  
Et ravi de penser que c'est de vous qu'ils viennent,  
Puisque c'est votre honneur que ses armes soutiennent,  
Je vais lui présenter mon estomac ouvert,  
Adorant de sa main la vôtre qui me perd. 1500

## CHIMÈNE

Si d'un triste devoir la juste violence,  
Qui me fait malgré moi poursuivre ta vaillance,  
Prescrit à ton amour une si forte loi  
Qu'il te rend sans défense à qui combat pour moi,  
En cet aveuglement ne perds pas la mémoire  
Qu'ainsi que de ta vie il y va de ta gloire,  
Et que, dans quelque éclat que Rodrigue ait vécu,  
Quand on le saura mort, on le croira vaincu.

Ton honneur t'est plus cher que je ne te suis chère,  
Puisqu'il trempe tes mains dans le sang de mon père, 1510  
Et te fait renoncer, malgré ta passion,



A l'espoir le plus doux de ma possession :  
 Je t'en vois cependant faire si peu de conte,  
 Que sans rendre combat tu veux qu'on te surmonte.  
 Quelle inégalité ravale ta vertu ?  
 Pourquoi ne l'as-tu plus, ou pourquoi l'avais-tu ?  
 Quoi ? n'es-tu généreux que pour me faire outrage ?  
 S'il ne faut m'offenser, n'as-tu point de courage ?  
 Et traites-tu mon père avec tant de rigueur  
 Qu'après l'avoir vaincu, tu souffres un vainqueur ?  
 Va, sans vouloir mourir, laisse-moi te poursuivre,  
 Et défends ton honneur, si tu ne veux plus vivre.

1520

DON RODRIGUE

Après la mort du comte, et les Maures défaits,  
 Faudrait-il à ma gloire encor d'autres effets ?  
 Elle peut dédaigner le soin de me défendre :  
 On sait que mon courage ose tout entreprendre,  
 Que ma valeur peut tout, et que dessous les cieux,  
 Auprès de mon honneur, rien ne m'est précieux.  
 Non, non, en ce combat, quoi que vous veuillez croire,  
 Rodrigue peut mourir sans hasarder sa gloire,  
 Sans qu'on l'ose accuser d'avoir manqué de cœur,  
 Sans passer pour vaincu, sans souffrir un vainqueur.  
 On dira seulement : " Il adorait Chimène ;  
 Il n'a pas voulu vivre et mériter sa haine ;  
 Il a cédé lui-même à la rigueur du sort  
 Qui forçait sa maîtresse à poursuivre sa mort :  
 Elle voulait sa tête ; et son cœur magnanime,  
 S'il l'en eût refusée, eût pensé faire un crime.  
 Pour venger son honneur il perdit son amour,  
 Pour venger sa maîtresse il a quitté le jour,  
 Préférant, quelque espoir qu'eût son âme asservie,  
 Son honneur à Chimène, et Chimène à sa vie."  
 Ainsi donc vous verrez ma mort en ce combat,  
 Loin d'obscurcir ma gloire, en rehausser l'éclat ;

1530

1540

Et cet honneur suivra mon trépas volontaire,  
Que tout autre que moi n'eût pu vous satisfaire.

## CHIMÈNE

Puisque, pour t'empêcher de courir au trépas,  
Ta vie et ton honneur sont de faibles appas,  
Si jamais je t'aimai, cher Rodrigue, en revanche,  
Défends-toi maintenant pour m'ôter à don Sanche ; 1550  
Combats pour m'affranchir d'une condition  
Qui me donne à l'objet de mon aversion.  
Te dirai-je encor plus ? va, songe à ta défense,  
Pour forcer mon devoir, pour m'imposer silence,  
Et si tu sens pour moi ton cœur encore épris,  
Sors vainqueur d'un combat dont Chimène est le prix.  
Adieu : ce mot lâché me fait rougir de honte.

DON RODRIGUE, *seul*

Est-il quelque ennemi qu'à présent je ne dompte ?  
Paraissez, Navarrais, Maures et Castellans,  
Et tout ce que l'Espagne a nourri de vaillants ; 1560  
Unissez-vous ensemble, et faites une armée  
Pour combattre une main de la sorte animée :  
Joignez tous vos efforts contre un espoir si doux ;  
Pour en venir à bout, c'est trop peu que de vous.

## SCÈNE II

*L'Infante*

T'écouterai-je encor, respect de ma naissance,  
Qui fais un crime de mes feux ?  
T'écouterai-je, amour, dont la douce puissance  
Contre ce fier tyran fait révolter mes vœux ?  
Pauvre princesse, auquel des deux  
Dois-tu prêter obéissance ? 1570

Rodrigue, ta valeur te rend digne de moi ;  
Mais, pour être vaillant, tu n'es pas fils de roi.

Impitoyable sort, dont la rigueur sépare  
Ma gloire d'avec mes désirs !

Est-il dit que le choix d'une vertu si rare  
Coûte à ma passion de si grands déplaisirs ?

Ô cieux ! à combien de soupirs

Faut-il que mon cœur se prépare,  
Si jamais il n'obtient sur un si long tourment  
Ni d'éteindre l'amour, ni d'accepter l'amant !

1580

Mais c'est trop de scrupule, et ma raison s'étonne  
Du mépris d'un si digne choix :

Bien qu'aux monarques seuls ma naissance me donne,  
Rodrigue, avec honneur je vivrai sous tes lois.

Après avoir vaincu deux rois,

Pourrais-tu manquer de couronne ?

Et ce grand nom de Cid que tu viens de gagner  
Ne fait-il pas trop voir sur qui tu dois régner ?

Il est digne de moi, mais il est à Chimène ;

Le don que j'en ai fait me nuit.

1590

Entre eux la mort d'un père a si peu mis de haine  
Que le devoir du sang à regret le poursuit :

Ainsi n'espérons aucun fruit

De son crime, ni de ma peine,

Puisque pour me punir le destin a permis  
Que l'amour dure même entre deux ennemis.

## SCÈNE III

*L'Infante, Léonor*

L'INFANTE

Où viens-tu, Léonor ?

LÉONOR

Vous applaudir, madame,  
Sur le repos qu'enfin a retrouvé votre âme.

L'INFANTE

D'où viendrait ce repos dans un comble d'ennui ?

LÉONOR

Si l'amour vit d'espoir, et s'il meurt avec lui,  
Rodrigue ne peut plus charmer votre courage  
Vous savez le combat où Chimène l'engage :  
Puisqu'il faut qu'il y meure, ou qu'il soit son mari,  
Votre espérance est morte et votre esprit guéri.

1600

L'INFANTE

Ah ! qu'il s'en faut encor !

LÉONOR

Que pouvez-vous prétendre ?

L'INFANTE

Mais plutôt quel espoir me pourrais-tu défendre ?  
Si Rodrigue combat sous ces conditions,  
Pour en rompre l'effet, j'ai trop d'inventions.  
L'amour, ce doux auteur de mes cruels supplices,  
Aux esprits des amants apprend trop d'artifices.

1610

LÉONOR

Pourrez-vous quelque chose, après qu'un père mort  
N'a pu dans leurs esprits allumer de discord ?  
Car Chimène aisément montre par sa conduite  
Que la haine aujourd'hui ne fait pas sa poursuite.  
Elle obtient un combat, et pour son combattant  
C'est le premier offert qu'elle accepte à l'instant :  
Elle n'a point recours à ces mains généreuses  
Que tant d'exploits fameux rendent si glorieuses ;  
Don Sanche lui suffit et mérite son choix,  
Parce qu'il va s'armer pour la première fois.  
Elle aime en ce duel son peu d'expérience ;  
Comme il est sans renom, elle est sans défiance ;  
Et sa facilité vous doit bien faire voir  
Qu'elle cherche un combat qui force son devoir,  
Qui livre à son Rodrigue une victoire aisée,  
Et l'autorise enfin à paraître apaisée.

1620

L'INFANTE

Je le remarque assez, et toutefois mon cœur  
A l'envi de Chimène adore ce vainqueur.  
A quoi me résoudrai-je, amante infortunée ?

LÉONOR

A vous mieux souvenir de qui vous êtes née :  
Le ciel vous doit un roi, vous aimez un sujet !

1630

L'INFANTE

Mon inclination a bien changé d'objet.  
Je n'aime plus Rodrigue, un simple gentilhomme,  
Non, ce n'est plus ainsi que mon amour le nomme.  
Si j'aime, c'est l'auteur de tant de beaux exploits,  
C'est le valeureux Cid, le maître de deux rois.

Je me vaincrai pourtant, non de peur d'aucun blâme,  
Mais pour ne troubler pas une si belle flamme ;

Et quand pour m'obliger on l'aurait couronné,  
Je ne veux point reprendre un bien que j'ai donné :  
Puisqu'en un tel combat sa victoire est certaine,  
Allons encore un coup le donner à Chimène.  
Et toi, qui vois les traits dont mon cœur est percé,  
Viens me voir achever comme j'ai commencé.

1640

## SCÈNE IV

*Chimène, Elvire*

CHIMÈNE

Elvire, que je souffre, et que je suis à plaindre !  
Je ne sais qu'espérer, et je vois tout à craindre ;  
Aucun vœu ne m'échappe où j'ose consentir ;  
Je ne souhaite rien sans un prompt repentir.  
A deux rivaux pour moi je fais prendre les armes :  
Le plus heureux succès me coûtera des larmes ;  
Et quoi qu'en ma faveur en ordonne le sort,  
Mon père est sans vengeance, ou mon amant est mort.

1650

ELVIRE

D'un et d'autre côté je vous vois soulagée :  
Ou vous avez Rodrigue, ou vous êtes vengée :  
Et quoi que le destin puisse ordonner de vous,  
Il soutient votre gloire et vous donne un époux.

CHIMÈNE

Quoi ! l'objet de ma haine ou de tant de colère !  
L'assassin de Rodrigue ou celui de mon père !  
De tous les deux côtés on me donne un mari  
Encor tout teint du sang que j'ai le plus chéri ;  
De tous les deux côtés mon âme se rebelle :  
Je crains plus que la mort la fin de ma querelle.

1660

Allez, vengeance, amour, qui troublez mes esprits,  
 Vous n'avez point pour moi de douceurs à ce prix ;  
 Et toi, puissant moteur du destin qui m'outrage,  
 Termine ce combat sans aucun avantage,  
 Sans faire aucun des deux ni vaincu ni vainqueur.

ELVIRE

Ce serait vous traiter avec trop de rigueur.  
 Ce combat pour votre âme est un nouveau supplice,  
 S'il vous laisse obligée à demander justice,  
 A témoigner toujours ce haut ressentiment  
 Et poursuivre toujours la mort de votre amant.  
 Madame, il vaut bien mieux que sa rare vaillance,  
 Lui couronnant le front, vous impose silence ;  
 Que la loi du combat étouffe vos soupirs,  
 Et que le roi vous force à suivre vos désirs.

1670

CHIMÈNE

Quand il sera vainqueur, crois-tu que je me rende ?  
 Mon devoir est trop fort, et ma perte trop grande,  
 Et ce n'est pas assez, pour leur faire la loi,  
 Que celle du combat et le vouloir du roi.  
 Il peut vaincre don Sanche avec fort peu de peine,  
 Mais non pas avec lui la gloire de Chimène ;  
 Et quoi qu'à sa victoire un monarque ait promis,  
 Mon honneur lui fera mille autres ennemis.

1680

ELVIRE

Gardez, pour vous punir de cet orgueil étrange,  
 Que le ciel à la fin ne souffre qu'on vous venge.  
 Quoi ! vous voulez encor refuser le bonheur  
 De pouvoir maintenant vous taire avec honneur ?  
 Que prétend ce devoir, et qu'est-ce qu'il espère ?  
 La mort de votre amant vous rendra-t-elle un père ?  
 Est-ce trop peu pour vous que d'un coup de malheur ?

1690

Faut-il perte sur perte, et douleur sur douleur ?  
 Allez, dans le caprice où votre humeur s'obstine,  
 Vous ne méritez pas l'amant qu'on vous destine ;  
 Et nous verrons du ciel l'équitable courroux  
 Vous laisser, par sa mort, don Sanche pour époux.

## CHIMÈNE

Elvire, c'est assez des peines que j'endure,  
 Ne les redouble point de ce funeste augure.  
 Je veux, si je le puis, les éviter tous deux ;  
 Sinon en ce combat Rodrigue a tous mes vœux :  
 Non qu'une folle ardeur de son côté me penche ;  
 Mais s'il était vaincu, je serais à don Sanche :  
 Cette appréhension fait naître mon souhait.  
 Que vois-je, malheureuse ? Elvire, c'en est fait.

1700

## SCÈNE V

*Don Sanche, Chimène, Elvire*

## DON SANCHE

Obligé d'apporter à vos pieds cette épée . . .

## CHIMÈNE

Quoi ? du sang de Rodrigue encor toute trempée ?  
 Perfide, oses-tu bien te montrer à mes yeux,  
 Après m'avoir ôté ce que j'aimais le mieux ?  
 Éclate, mon amour, tu n'as plus rien à craindre :  
 Mon père est satisfait, cesse de te contraindre.  
 Un même coup a mis ma gloire en sûreté,  
 Mon âme au désespoir, ma flamme en liberté.

1710

## DON SANCHE

D'un esprit plus rassis . . .



CHIMÈNE

Tu me parles encore,  
Exécrable assassin d'un héros que j'adore ?  
Va, tu l'as pris en traître ; un guerrier si vaillant  
N'eût jamais succombé sous un tel assaillant.  
N'espère rien de moi, tu ne m'as point servie :  
En croyant me venger, tu m'as ôté la vie.

DON SANCHE

Étrange impression, qui loin de m'écouter . . .

CHIMÈNE

Veux-tu que de sa mort je t'écoute vanter,  
Que j'entende à loisir avec quelle insolence  
Tu peindras son malheur, mon crime et ta vaillance ?

1720

## SCÈNE VI

*Don Fernand, Don Diègue, Don Arias, Don Sanche,  
Don Alonse, Chimène, Elvire*

CHIMÈNE

Sire, il n'est plus besoin de vous dissimuler  
Ce que tous mes efforts ne vous ont pu celer.  
J'aimais, vous l'avez su ; mais pour venger mon père,  
J'ai bien voulu proscrire une tête si chère :  
Votre Majesté, sire, elle-même a pu voir  
Comme j'ai fait céder mon amour au devoir.  
Enfin Rodrigue est mort, et sa mort m'a changée  
D'implacable ennemie en amante affligée.  
J'ai dû cette vengeance à qui m'a mise au jour,  
Et je dois maintenant ces pleurs à mon amour.  
Don Sanche m'a perdue en prenant ma défense  
Et du bras qui me perd je suis la récompense !

1730

Sire, si la pitié peut émouvoir un roi,  
De grâce, révoquez une si dure loi ;  
Pour prix d'une victoire où je perds ce que j'aime,  
Je lui laisse mon bien ; qu'il me laisse à moi-même :  
Qu'en un cloître sacré je pleure incessamment,  
Jusqu'au dernier soupir, mon père et mon amant.

1740

## DON DIÈGUE

Enfin elle aime, sire, et ne croit plus un crime  
D'avouer par sa bouche un amour légitime.

## DON FERNAND

Chimène, sors d'erreur, ton amant n'est pas mort,  
Et don Sanche vaincu t'a fait un faux rapport.

## DON SANCHE

Sire, un peu trop d'ardeur malgré moi l'a déçue ;  
Je venais du combat lui raconter l'issue :  
Ce généreux guerrier, dont son cœur est charmé :  
"Ne crains rien," m'a-t-il dit quand il m'a désarmé ;  
"Je laisserais plutôt la victoire incertaine  
Que de répandre un sang hasardé pour Chimène ;  
Mais puisque mon devoir m'appelle auprès du roi,  
Va de notre combat l'entretenir pour moi,  
De la part du vainqueur lui porter ton épée."  
Sire, j'y suis venu : cet objet l'a trompée ;  
Elle m'a cru vainqueur, me voyant de retour,  
Et soudain sa colère a trahi son amour.  
Avec tant de transport et tant d'impatience,  
Que je n'ai pu gagner un moment d'audience.

1750

Pour moi, bien que vaincu, je me répute heureux ;  
Et malgré l'intérêt de mon cœur amoureux,  
Perdant infiniment, j'aime encor ma défaite  
Qui fait le beau succès d'une amour si parfaite.

1760

DON FERNAND

Ma fille, il ne faut point rougir d'un si beau feu,  
Ni chercher les moyens d'en faire un désaveu.  
Une louable honte en vain t'en sollicite :  
Ta gloire est dégagée, et ton devoir est quitte ;  
Ton père est satisfait, et c'était le venger  
Que mettre tant de fois ton Rodrigue en danger.  
Tu vois comme le ciel autrement en dispose.  
Ayant tant fait pour lui, fais pour toi quelque chose,  
Et ne sois point rebelle à mon commandement  
Qui te donne un époux aimé si chèrement.

1770

SCÈNE VII

*Don Fernand, Don Diègue, Don Arias, Don Rodrigue, Don  
Alonse, Don Sanche, l'Infante, Chimène, Léonor, Elvire*

L'INFANTE

Sèche tes pleurs, Chimène, et reçois sans tristesse  
Ce généreux vainqueur des mains de ta princesse.

DON RODRIGUE

Ne vous offensez point, sire, si devant vous  
Un respect amoureux me jette à ses genoux.  
Je ne viens point ici demander ma conquête :  
Je viens tout de nouveau vous apporter ma tête,  
Madame ; mon amour n'emploiera point pour moi  
Ni la loi du combat, ni le vouloir du roi.  
Si tout ce qui s'est fait est trop peu pour un père,  
Dites par quels moyens il vous faut satisfaire.  
Faut-il combattre encor mille et mille rivaux,  
Aux deux bouts de la terre étendre mes travaux,  
Forcer moi seul un camp, mettre en fuite une armée,  
Des héros fabuleux passer la renommée ?

1780

Si mon crime par là se peut enfin laver,  
J'ose tout entreprendre, et puis tout achever ;  
Mais si ce fier honneur, toujours inexorable,  
Ne se peut apaiser sans la mort du coupable,  
N'armez plus contre moi le pouvoir des humains :  
Ma tête est à vos pieds, vengez-vous par vos mains ;  
Vos mains seules ont droit de vaincre un invincible ;  
Prenez une vengeance à tout autre impossible.  
Mais du moins que ma mort suffise à me punir :  
Ne me bannissez point de votre souvenir ;  
Et puisque mon trépas conserve votre gloire,  
Pour vous en revancher conservez ma mémoire,  
Et dites quelquefois, en déplorant mon sort :  
“ S'il ne m'avait aimée, il ne serait pas mort.”

1790

1800

## CHIMÈNE

Relève-toi, Rodrigue. Il faut l'avouer, sire,  
Je vous en ai trop dit pour m'en pouvoir dédire.  
Rodrigue a des vertus que je ne puis haïr ;  
Et quand un roi commande, on lui doit obéir.  
Mais à quoi que déjà vous m'ayez condamnée,  
Pourrez-vous à vos yeux souffrir cet hyménée ?  
Et quand de mon devoir vous voulez cet effort,  
Toute votre justice en est-elle d'accord ?  
Si Rodrigue à l'État devient si nécessaire,  
De ce qu'il fait pour vous dois-je être le salaire  
Et me livrer moi-même au reproche éternel  
D'avoir trempé mes mains dans le sang paternel ?

1810

## DON FERNAND

Le temps assez souvent a rendu légitime  
Ce qui semblait d'abord ne se pouvoir sans crime :  
Rodrigue t'a gagnée, et tu dois être à lui.  
Mais quoique sa valeur t'ait conquise aujourd'hui,  
Il faudrait que je fusse ennemi de ta gloire  
Pour lui donner sitôt le prix de sa victoire.

Cet hymen différé ne rompt point une loi  
 Qui sans marquer de temps lui destine ta foi. 1820  
 Prends un an, si tu veux, pour essuyer tes larmes.

Rodrigue, cependant il faut prendre les armes.  
 Après avoir vaincu les Maures sur nos bords,  
 Renversé leurs desseins, repoussé leurs efforts,  
 Va jusqu'en leur pays leur reporter la guerre,  
 Commander mon armée et ravager leur terre :  
 A ce nom seul de Cid ils trembleront d'effroi ;  
 Ils t'ont nommé seigneur et te voudront pour roi.  
 Mais parmi tes hauts faits sois-lui toujours fidèle :  
 Reviens-en, s'il se peut, encor plus digne d'elle ; 1830  
 Et par tes grands exploits fais-toi si bien priser  
 Qu'il lui soit glorieux alors de t'épouser.

DON RODRIGUE

Pour posséder Chimène, et pour votre service,  
 Que peut-on m'ordonner que mon bras n'accomplisse ?  
 Quoi qu'absent de ses yeux il me faille endurer,  
 Sire, ce m'est trop d'heur de pouvoir espérer.

DON FERNAND

Espère en ton courage, espère en ma promesse ;  
 Et possédant déjà le cœur de ta maîtresse,  
 Pour vaincre un point d'honneur qui combat contre toi,  
 Laisse faire le temps, ta vaillance et ton roi. 1840

# NOTES

(The figures refer to the lines in the text)

## NOTE ON THE VOCABULARY

In *Le Cid*, as in many other French plays of the classical age, certain poetic words are used in place of the more ordinary: thus 'death' is commonly expressed by *trépas* (rather than by *mort*), 'anger' by *courroux*, 'marriage' by *hymen* or *hyménée*, 'life' by *jour* or *jours*. The word *amour* occurs, but metaphorical words for 'love'—i.e., *flamme*, *feu*, *fers*, and *chaînes* are frequently used instead.

## ACT I

### SCENE I

This scene serves the double purpose of conveying necessary information to the audience and of revealing Chimène's love for Rodrigue and her high hopes of gaining parental consent to the match. It is done with admirable economy of words, and emphasizes what might otherwise be easy to forget as the play proceeds, that Chimène is a young and eager girl, not a mature and statuesque heroine.

1. *m'as-tu fait*: note that Chimène uses *tu* in addressing Elvire, whereas the latter uses the respectful *vous*. The same holds good of conversations between the Infanta and Léonor.
3. *mes sens à moi-même*: 'my (own) feelings.' This added dative is often used for emphasis or to avoid ambiguity.  
*encor*: the final *e* is suppressed for the sake of the metre. Here the *en* = 'by,' the 'it' meaning 'what I have heard.'
5. *je ne m'abuse à*: 'I am not mistaken in': not to be confused with *abuser de*, which usually means 'to take an unfair advantage of.'
6. *flamme*: 'passion,' 'love.' See introductory note above.

9. **en** : *i.e.*, 'from what he said.'
10. **se** : the pronoun belongs to *entendre*, but this transposition is not uncommon, especially in poetry.
11. **feux** : 'ardour.'
12. **au jour** : 'in daylight'—*i.e.*, 'openly.'
13. **brigue** : 'wooing:' not here in the bad sense of underhand intrigue. We are to understand that Don Sanche and Rodrigue, both suitors, have paid court to Chimène through Elvire.
16. **me penche d'un côté** : 'inclines me to one side'—*i.e.*, in favour of one of them. The Academy condemned Corneille's use of *pencher* with a personal pronoun as an object.
18. **espérance** : here the object of both *enfle* and *détruit*.
21. **respect** : *i.e.*, for her father's wishes.
22. **sur l'heure** : 'at once,' 'then and there.'
27. **qui font lire** : a literal translation will not do here. Some such phrase as 'in their eyes one can readily discern' etc. would serve.
28. **vertu** : 'valour,' not 'virtue.' The Latin *virtus* has a similar meaning.
29. **n'a trait** : modern French would require *n'a aucun trait* or *n'a pas de trait*.
32. **lauriers** : in the figurative sense of 'honours': cf. the English phrase 'to rest on one's laurels.'
44. **regarde** : 'such an honour concerns him,' *i.e.*, 'he is the obvious person to receive such an honour.'
49. **résolu** : 'induced.' In modern French *décider* or *déterminer* would probably be used.
52. **contents** : used as a rule of people rather than things. *Satisfaits* or *contentés* would be likely in modern French.

## SCENE II

It should be borne in mind that a new scene does not imply a change of scenery or an interval in the action, but merely the exit of characters or possibly the arrival of another to join them. In this scene the unhappy Infanta discloses that her zeal in promoting the union of Chimène with Rodrigue is prompted by her own too ardent liking for Rodrigue. Her position renders marriage to anybody of less than

royal blood impossible and she hopes that, once Rodrigue is safely married to someone else, she will find it easier to put thoughts of him out of her mind. Although a little long, this scene allows time for the King to choose a *gouverneur* for his son, and so leads up to the important scene between the Count and Don Diègue.

- 63. *dans son entretien* : 'in conversation with her.'
- 66. *les traits* : 'the shafts' (of love)—*i.e.*, Cupid's darts.
- 76. *alors qu'ils* : 'when they.'
- 80. *ma vertu* : 'my resolution.' This is the subject of *brave*.
- 82. *cavalier* : 'knight' here, not 'horseman' or 'lady's escort.'
- 90. *vous souvient-il* : the reflexive would now be used instead of this impersonal form.
- 97. *où ma gloire s'engage* : 'where my honour is involved.'
- 103. *en ses liens* : in Corneille's time the preposition *en* was used in many phrases where *dans* or *à* would now be required : here the meaning is 'in the bonds of his love.'
- 114. *jusques* : in poetry *jusques* is freely used for *jusque* to suit the exigencies of metre.  
*aimable* : 'dear to me,' rather than merely 'agreeable.'
- 116. *déplaisir* : 'grief' or 'sorrow,' not 'annoyance.'
- 117. *contraigne* : subjunctive with *que* following a phrase that denotes emotion.
- 123. *gloire* : 'honour' or 'reputation.'
- 124. *il* refers to *cet hymen*.
- 130. *l'amorce* : in the sense of 'bait' *i.e.* 'lure.'
- 140. *remettre mon visage* : 'regain my composure.'

### SCENE III

In this celebrated scene the quarrel between the Count and Don Diègue culminates in a blow, which sets the whole tragedy in motion. Note the studied moderation shown at first by Don Diègue, until at length his forbearance comes to an end. Long speeches give way to short exchanges, the conflict of words heralding the deadlier contest which is to follow.



152. **en un rang** : here, again, *à*, not *en*, would be required in modern French.
157. **Pour grands que soient** : 'however great' or 'great though (kings may be, etc.).' *Si grands* or *quelque grands . . . que* would to-day be more usual.
159. **sert de preuve** : 'serves as (a) : ' not to be confused with *se servir de*, 'to make use of.'
160. **les services présents** : note the deliberate contrast with the *services passés* of the previous speech.
162. **l'a pu faire** : 'may have caused (or "dictated") it.' Don Diègue, wishing to broach the subject of the marriage, is as conciliatory as possible.
167. **fil** is often regarded as rhyming with words ending in *is* in which the *s* is mute.
170. **ce beau fil** : Don Gomès sarcastically puts *beau* with *fil*, thus suggesting *beau-fils*, which means, like *gendre* in the line above, a son-in-law. *Prétendre* would here mean 'to aspire' and *parti* is used in the sense of 'a match,' a person eligible for marriage.
174. **comme** : nowadays *comment* would be required here.
184. **l'effet** : 'by the act'—*i.e.*, by deeds as opposed to words, which, of course, Don Diègue would be too infirm to be able to do.
185. **en dépit de l'envie** : 'whatever envious tongues may say.'
189. **ordonner** : not 'to command,' but to 'draw up an army in battle-order.'
199. **lois** : 'dominion' or 'authority.'
208. **sous moi** : stung by the arrogance of the previous speech, Don Diègue, in his turn, begins to show resentment, deliberately pointing out that the Count has once been his subordinate. But he then masters his indignation with a polite reference to the *rare valeur* of Don Gomès.
218. **en être refusé** : 'to be refused it : ' *refuser de quelque-chose* was a seventeenth-century construction : the second *en* stands for *de pouvoir mieux l'exercer*.
222. **le mesure** : *i.e.*, 'makes the honour proportionate to my valour.'
225. **ton** : note the change from *votre* to *ton* as the quarrel reaches its height.
233. **en dépit de l'envie** : a scornful repetition of Don Diègue's use of the phrase in line 185.

## SCENE IV

Don Diègue, in this soliloquy, bewails the physical weakness that renders him powerless to avenge the deadly affront put on him.

239. *ne suis-je blanchi*: 'has not my hair grown white.'  
 244. *ma querelle*: 'my cause.'  
 249. *de votre éclat*: *i.e.*, is the Count to triumph as the result of the new, and, as it now seems, disastrous honour conferred upon Don Diègue?

## SCENE V

Don Diègue, brushing aside Rodrigue's love as of secondary importance in comparison with the stain on the family honour, charges his son to avenge the insult.

261. *du cœur*: 'spirit,' 'courage.'  
*tout autre que*: 'anyone else but.' It must be borne in mind that Rodrigue is young and, as yet, untested in battle.  
 270. *envie*: 'desire,' 'longing': not 'envy.'  
 276. *à redouter*: 'to be feared,' 'formidable.'  
 286. *Enfin tu sais l'affront*: At this point Don Diègue ceases to mourn. Satisfied that his quarrel is in good hands, he abandons rhetoric and issues curt orders.

## SCENE VI

Rodrigue, finding himself in a cruel dilemma, soliloquizes. The tone of his soliloquy is lyrical, and for this reason Corneille here breaks away from the Alexandrines in which the rest of the play is written. It has been said that the speech contains too many literary conceits which are inappropriate in the mouth of a man who is in the grip of deep emotion and supposedly voicing his thoughts without premeditation. But this seems an unduly narrow view to adopt. The doubts, hesitations, and conflicting emotions are well brought out, and, his decision once made, Rodrigue never wavers.

292. *atteinte*: 'a blow.'  
 315. *cher et cruel*: the hope is precious since he hopes to avenge his father, but cruel because his action will grieve Chimène.

316. *ensemble*: 'at the same time.'
331. *sans tirer ma raison*: *i.e.*, without obtaining redress (or satisfaction) for a wrong.
333. *Endurer que*: 'to suffer . . . to.' This construction would scarcely be valid now, though *souffrir* could be used.
337. *penser*: used here as a noun: *pensée* would now be preferred.  
*suborneur*: 'tempting' or perhaps 'insidious.'
343. *que je meure*: 'whether I die.'
348. *en peine*: 'uneasy.'

## ACT II

## SCENE I

Note that Corneille seldom specifies the precise locality. In Act I the action of the first two scenes is, presumably, laid in Chimène's house: that of Scenes III, IV, and V immediately outside the king's palace, perhaps in the square. Act II likewise opens apparently outside the royal palace though, strictly, a room in the Count's house would be more appropriate. It is clear at all events that there has been some brief lapse of time, for in the interval the King has heard of the quarrel and now makes it known through Don Arias that he holds the Count to be in the wrong, and requires him to admit it and make amends. Though aware that he has not behaved well, the Count cannot bring himself to do this. He professes to believe that his services to the King will speak convincingly on his behalf, and he feels that to abandon the position he has taken up would be to forfeit his honour.

352. *l'a porté trop haut*: colloquially, *le porter haut* means 'to think too much of oneself, to fancy oneself': here the sense is that the Count had allowed himself to go too far, to act high-handedly.
355. *il y prend grande part*: 'he feels strongly about it, takes the matter to heart.'
359. *submissions* = *soumissions*: 'apologies.'

360. **qui passent le commun** : 'beyond the ordinary.'
362. **trop d'emportement** : 'too much hastiness'—*i.e.*, in placing your life at the King's disposal, since the King still has a regard for you.
370. **redevable** : 'indebted to,' 'under an obligation to.'
373. **sur cette confiance** : 'if you are relying on that'—*i.e.*, your services.
376. **que toute sa grandeur**, etc. : Note how the arrogance of the Count asserts itself the more as Don Arias reasons with him. Corneille shrewdly shows Don Gomès as the more obstinately determined to stick to his guns because of his inward knowledge that he is at fault.
381. **en** : in modern French, *à*.
384. **conseil** : 'decision' here, not 'advice.'
385. **conte** : in modern French, *compte*.
389. **tâche à** : *de* would now be more usual.
394. **disgrâces** : 'misfortunes.'

## SCENE II

Here the better side of the Count's nature is shown. He understands that Rodrigue is doing his duty and admires his spirit. Moreover, he is reluctant to accept the challenge of a young man. It is only when it is impossible to refuse without loss of honour that the Count, confident that he will be the survivor, agrees to fight.

397. **à moi** : not, of course, in the sense of 'help!', but rather to attract the Count's attention. Thus 'listen' would convey the meaning.  
**parle** : the Count uses the singular, not in scorn, but as an older man addressing a junior. But Rodrigue intentionally uses the same form.
399. **la même vertu** : 'courage itself : ' in modern French *même* would follow the noun.
406. **n'attend point** : 'does not wait upon (years).'
409. **mes pareils à deux fois** : the sense is that men like Rodrigue do not need more than one test to prove their worth.
434. **à vaincre**, etc. : this is one of the succinct and virile lines that Corneille knew so well how to write.

## SCENE III

This scene takes place either in Chimène's room or in the Infanta's apartments in the Royal Palace. In point of time it follows directly on Scene II. Despite the Infanta's attempts to reassure her, Chimène, though aware only of the quarrel and not of the duel in progress, knows the character of the people concerned and understands the gravity of the situation far better than the Infanta, who is really striving to reassure herself.

445. *faible*: the word is doubtless used in a kindly attempt to make light of the affair.
447. *pour le*: *i.e.*, 'because you, etc.'
448. *ennuis*: 'sorrows,' not 'petty annoyances.'
449. *bonace*: 'a calm.' The noun is obsolete, though the adjective *bonasse*, with which the word is really identical is often used in the sense of 'bland' or 'placid.'
452. *d'accord*: *étaient* is here understood.
460. *que tu*, etc.: 'how many tears, etc.'
466. *l'impossible*: 'my utmost.'
467. *en ce point*: the sense is that no compromise is possible when things have 'come to such a pass.'
476. *ce discord*: this word is of rare occurrence in prose: it is used in the opposite sense to *accord*—*i.e.*, 'misunderstanding.'
483. *le sont du premier coup*: virtually the same sentiment that Rodrigue expressed in line 409. This indicates how well matched he and Chimène are.
493. *intéressée*: 'vitaly concerned.'
495. *mais si*: 'but suppose.'
497. *l'effet*: 'the putting into action.'

## SCENE IV

503. *tout bas*: we infer from this that bystanders were present when Rodrigue accosted the Count: hence the former's *parlons bas* in line 398.

## SCENE V

The news that the two men may be engaged in a duel causes the Infanta, now that Chimène has gone out to learn what is happening, to cherish hopes

which she had done her best to stifle. Léonor, without success, tries to reason with her.

516. **pompeuse**: the meaning here is not 'pompous,' but rather 'majestic' or 'superb.'  
**me fait la loi**: 'lays down the law to me,' *i.e.*, 'dictates my conduct.'  
 523. **qu'avec peu d'effet**: 'with how little result.'  
 532. **dessous**: in modern French *sous*.  
 533. **en faire cas**: 'to value,' 'to set store by.'  
 541. **journées**: meaning here 'days of battle,' *i.e.*, feats of arms.  
 542. **delà**: in modern French *au delà de* would be used.  
 548. **ensuite**: not in the modern sense of 'afterwards,' but as the equivalent of *en suite de*, 'as the outcome of.'

## SCENE VI

This scene takes place in the King's palace and opens with Don Arias reporting his failure to induce the Count to submit to the King's wishes. Don Fernand argues that the Count's refusal to recognize the royal choice of *gouverneur* is an insult to the Crown and orders his arrest. Don Sanche chivalrously pleads for the Count, but Don Fernand will hear no more and changes the subject by referring to the appearance of Moorish galleys near the mouth of the Guadalquivir. Unwilling to alarm the populace the King, in face of this danger, merely orders that the guards shall be doubled.

560. **mon pouvoir**: 'my utmost,' 'everything in my power.'  
 565. **qu'il soit**: 'even if he be.'  
 572. **vous assurer de lui**: 'make sure of his person,' *i.e.*, 'arrest him.'  
 586. **à ce mot seul**: *i.e.*, to the distasteful word *submissions*.  
 589. **nourri dans les alarmes**: 'toughened in battle.'  
 590. **à la pointe des armes**: 'at the sword's point.'  
 592. **attendant qu'**: 'until.' Don Sanche means that, pending the Count's coming, he himself will answer for it that the Count would gladly make amends in battle for his lack of respect for the king's authority.

593. *à l'âge*: 'youth.'
596. *est meilleur ménager*: *ménagère* is a housewife: *ménager* means 'to husband.' But there is no English equivalent of the masculine form of the noun: perhaps 'is more thrifty' or 'is less prodigal' would serve.
598. *le chef*: 'the head.'
603. *perdu d'honneur*: 'dishonoured.'
607. *au reste*: 'by the way': a singularly casual way of introducing such a potentially grave subject.
609. *la bouche*: *l'embouchure* is more usual for the mouth of a river, even though the name of the county or department in France is called '*Bouches du Rhône*.'
610. *Les Maures ont appris, etc.*: Don Arias speaks as a flattering courtier, but the King, despite his relative inaction, appreciates the danger, as his next speech indicates.
617. *dans Séville*: As a matter of historical fact, Don Fernand was never ruler of Seville which, at this date, was still in Moorish hands. Corneille falsified geography and history in order to make it possible for the arrival of the Moors and the ensuing battle to take place, together with the other incidents of the play, in the space of twenty-four hours.

## SCENE VII

Don Alonso announces the Count's death in the duel and the approach of Chimène to demand justice on Rodrigue.

635. *prévenir*: 'to ward off,' 'avert.'

## SCENE VIII

There are six characters on the stage in this scene, and of these only three speak. It is worth noting in passing how small is the number of personages in most French tragedies of the classical age in comparison with those of Shakespeare. Chimène and Don Diègue put their case in turn to the King. Don Fernand refuses to give an immediate decision and rules that the matter must be discussed *en plein conseil*.

656. *je prends part*: this has much the same meaning as *compatisse* in line 638: 'I feel compassion for,' 'I sympathize with.'
658. *vous parlerez après*: this is said to Don Diègue. The King, in this awkward situation, acts with dignity.
660. *bouillons*: literally 'bubbles': perhaps, taken with the verb *couler*, the phrase should be translated by 'gush' or 'spurt.'
663. *tout sorti*: 'though now all shed.'
665. *qu'*: equivalent here to *ce qu'*: 'that which' or rather 'what war dared not,' etc.
667. *sur le lieu*: 'to the spot.'
676. *écrivait mon devoir*: 'told me what I must do.' In this and in the lines that follow there are literary conceits which now seem rather artificial.
680. *empruntait ma voix*: 'spoke by my voice.'
686. *brave*: 'defies,' i.e., by going unpunished.
690. *allégeance*: not in the sense of 'allegiance,' but of the idea contained in the verb *alléger*: i.e., 'consolation' or 'relief.'
691. *en la mort*: another instance, of which there have already been several, of *en* being used when in modern French *dans*, or here, *à* would be needed.
696. *tout*: meaning here 'everyone' rather than 'everything.'
697. *qu'on est digne*: 'how deserving of envy,' etc.
699. *apprête*: 'prepares,' 'stores up.'
703. *pour avoir*: 'because I have.'
714. *descendaient*: 'would have gone down.'
722. *failli*: not 'failed' here, but rather 'done wrong.'
723. *débats*: 'dispute,' not 'debate,' in this context.
727. *chef*: 'head,' as in line 598.
735. *remettez*: 'take back:' *ramenez* would now be used, as applied to a person.
736. *ma cour et sa foi*: i.e., 'will give his word of honour not to go beyond the palace grounds.'
740. *croître*: the transitive use is now inadmissible and *augmenter* or, perhaps, *accroître* would be required.



## ACT III

## SCENE I

The scene is a room in Chimène's house, and overlaps in time the final scene of Act II. Rodrigue has come, not to plead for mercy, but to entreat Chimène to kill him, since he recognizes the justice of her anger even though his own conscience is easy. Elvire, aghast at his presence and afraid of scandal, hides him hastily as Don Sanche escorts Chimène back from the palace.

747. *a voulu* : 'required' or 'demanded.'  
 754. *de mériter* : 'for (or "through") deserving.'  
 756. *l'arrêt* : 'the sentence' or 'the judgment.'  
 758. *transports* : this can be used of any powerful emotion, pleasant or the reverse.  
 764. *la* : refers to *colère*.  
 769. *pour comble à* : now, usually, *de*, not *à*.

## SCENE II

Acting on Elvire's injunction, Rodrigue has concealed himself before Chimène comes in. But he can overhear Don Sanche offering, should the royal justice be tardy, to fight Rodrigue himself.

780. *trop* : used here in the sense of *très*.  
 781. *malheureuse* : this single word helps to make plain to the audience and to the listening Rodrigue the forlornness of Chimène and the intensity of her grief.  
 783. *elle* : refers to 'justice.'  
 789. *que* : with the meaning of *si* in the line above.

## SCENE III

This is almost the first moment since the death of her father that Chimène has had to herself. True, Elvire is there, but to her she can speak freely. She is grieved by her father's death, yet more grieved by the fact that Rodrigue's courage has rendered him dearer to her than before, despite which she must do her best to bring about his death. Moreover, we must remember that she has no one to whom to turn for comfort and support.

794. l'atteinte : 'the wound' (caused by the *vives douleurs*).  
 798. trame : thread (of life).  
 800. la moitié : 'one half' (meaning Rodrigue) : *l'autre* (meaning her father).  
 802. celle : this refers to *la moitié*.  
 803. reposez-vous : the sort of tiresome remark that *confidantes* are fated to make. Not unnaturally, it irritates Chimène.  
 805. par où : 'how.'  
 807. qu'un : 'except a.'  
 818. sans partager : 'without dividing.' Chimène means that, whatever her private feelings, her resolve is unaltered.  
 820. consulte : 'deliberate : ' *i.e.*, 'hesitate.'  
 822. son intérêt : not so much 'his interest' as 'my interest in him'—*i.e.*, 'my love for him.'  
 832. orrai : future of *ouïr*, 'to hear.'  
 834. impuissantes : 'useless.'  
 843. de quoi que : 'however . . .'  
 848. le poursuivre : 'bring him to justice.' In a sense this line summarizes both the play and the character of the speaker.

## SCENE IV

Elvire, one supposes, had been hoping to send Rodrigue away before he could speak to Chimène. Fortunately she is unsuccessful and the interview between the young couple provides one of the finest scenes in the play. There is no physical conflict, but a most logical and dramatic clash of ideas and wills. At the end of it the mutual respect and love of Rodrigue and Chimène are even greater than before, but the purpose of each remains unchanged.

850. assurez-vous : 'secure for yourself.'  
 860. reproche ton crime et ta vie : in the sense of being a hateful reminder of the deed and of the fact that Chimène has still permitted him to live.  
 869. je fais, etc. : with the words Rodrigue sheathes his sword.  
 873. une chaleur trop prompte : Rodrigue chooses a deliberately inoffensive way of describing the Count's action.

881. son pouvoir: 'its power'—*i.e.*, of his love. The following sentence is in explanation.
883. souffrir: in modern French the *à* would be repeated here.
886. emportait: 'would have weighed down' (the scales).
887. à moins que, etc.: 'if I had . . .'
888. qu'un: '(the thought) that a . . .'
890. qui: 'she who.'
892. diffamer: 'dishonour.'
895. m'y porter: 'to bring myself to it.'
915. pour m'affliger: 'to my grief.'
917. ton intérêt: 'your share'—*i.e.*, that you are the person involved.
919. le bien: 'the joy.'
925. cet effort sur ma flamme: 'this overcoming of my love.'
928. de lâches sentiments: an echo of Rodrigue's words in line 872.
929. de quoi qu', etc.: 'however forcibly our love speaks to me.'
930. générosité: nobility (of conduct).
936. l'arrêt: 'the sentence.'
940. ta partie: 'your adversary' (in a law suit).
949. du mien: refers to *père*: so does *du tien* in the next line.
952. en: refers to *aide*.
956. traits: this is difficult to translate: possibly 'signs' or 'influence' would serve.
969. en te laissant la vie: here for the first time Chimène's love causes her to waver in her resolution. Under stress of emotion she will go on frankly to admit her love and her hope that her efforts will fail. Nevertheless, she will do her best to make them succeed, thus showing herself worthy of Rodrigue even though her success means his death. It is natural that she should shrink from striking the blow herself, and she would forfeit our sympathy if she did take the sword. But her general determination remains firm.
974. ce qu': meaning Rodrigue himself.  
encore que: although.
988. heur: 'good fortune:' this is obsolete, but exists now in *bonheur* and *malheur*.
989. si près du port: a reminder of Chimène's forebodings in line 451.
997. qu'on te voie: *ne* would now be inserted.

## SCENE V

Here again the locality is vague. Don Diègue was bidden by the King to remain within the palace precincts, but it seems that he is in the street outside Chimène's house, having been wandering about much disturbed by the absence of Rodrigue.

1005. *en*: refers to *soucis*, not to *contentements*.

1022. *ou si je*: 'or do I.'

1024. *cessés*: *sont* is understood.

## SCENE VI

Don Diègue, who has not seen his son since the duel, expresses his pride and thankfulness. But Rodrigue, deeply dejected, though conscious of having done right, claims the right to seek death now that his duty is done. His father, however, urges him to take command of five hundred men and lead them against the Moors. If he should be killed in the encounter, he will have found an honourable death. If he returns victorious, then the King will not fall in with Chimène's wishes, and she herself may well decide to press her claim no further and perhaps consent to marry him. But there is no time for further discussion, and Rodrigue sets off at once.

1039. *je ne pouvais pas moins*: 'I could do no less.'

1044. *m'ose*: the pronoun (*m'*) is the object of *satisfaire*.

1046. *le flatte*: literally 'flatters my despair,' *i.e.*, seems to dispel it.

1053. *porte plus haut*: 'exalt, lift higher.'

1058. *un honneur*: 'one honour.'

1062. *du change*: 'of fickleness.'

1065. *injure*: 'insult,' not 'injury.'

1066. *souffrez-moi*: 'suffer me to be.'

1068. *encor si*: 'still, even if.'

1075. *le flux*: 'the tide.' Corneille, remember, lived in the port of Rouen for many years.

1080. *que j'ai trouvé*: normally *permettre* would need to be followed by a subjunctive clause or by an infinitive with *de*.

*cinq cents*: this use as a noun is unusual. These men had come to help redress the dishonour done to Don Diègue. Thanks to this device they are already

on the spot and can be led at once against the Moors, thus helping Corneille to preserve the unity of time.

1083. *prévenus*: 'forestalled.'

1090. *fais devoir à*: 'make the King owe.'

1100. *au comte*: 'in the count.'

## ACT IV

### SCENE I

The scene is again Chimène's house and the time fairly early in the morning. Elvire tells Chimène that, during the night, Rodrigue and his small force have won a resounding victory over the Moors. Overjoyed at the news, Chimène nevertheless steels herself to continue to press for justice.

1102. *comme*: *comment* would now be used.

1133. *die*: the old form of *dise*.

1142. *voici venir l'infante*: in modern French *voici l'infante qui vient*.

### SCENE II

The Infanta has come to see how Chimène takes the news of the victory. Learning that she is still resolved to press her case, the Infanta suggests that to do so now that Rodrigue is a popular hero would do her harm in public estimation. Would it not be better to let Rodrigue live, and merely to renounce all association with him? But Chimène refuses to be deflected from her purpose.

1147. *autre*: 'no one but.'

1150. *souffrent*: 'allow.'

1154. *fâcheux*: 'grievous.' In the next speech the Infanta asks Chimène her reason for using this seemingly inappropriate adjective.

1155. *je l'entends publier*: 'I hear him proclaimed.'

1166. *plus . . . et plus*: 'the more . . . the more.' In modern French the *et* is usually omitted.

1168. *poursuivre*: 'to seek.'

1169. *hier*: doubtless a deliberate indication of the lapse of time, the total action of the play being spread over twenty-four hours from about noon or one day to the same hour on the next.

1182. **la ruine publique**: the Infanta's argument is that, with Rodrigue the only sure shield against the Moors, to seek his death is equivalent to working for the destruction of the people, something akin to treason.
1186. **pour être punis**: 'that we should be punished.'
1189. **en**=*de l'épouser*.
1196. **cypres**: the cypress tree is a symbol of mourning. In Italy, for instance, it is often grown in cemeteries.
1199. **c'en est une**, etc.: 'it is an even more notable (act of nobility).'
1200. **donne**: 'sacrifices,' 'surrenders.'
1203. **que**: 'let.'
1204. **aussi bien**: 'besides.'
1208. **après mon père mort**: 'with my father dead.'

### SCENE III

Although his fate is not yet decided, Rodrigue, at the instance of his father, has come to the palace, where the King thanks him for his services and makes it plain that he does not intend to listen to Chimène's pleas. At his bidding Rodrigue gives an account of the action. Since we already know that he defeated the Moors, this description of the action rather holds up that of the play. For all that, it is a stirring narrative.

1211. **race**: this speech is addressed to Rodrigue and the word is used here with the meaning of 'offspring' or 'scion.'
1212. **la tienne**: refers to *valeur*.
1217. **en ces alarmes**: 'in this emergency.'
1220. **s'acquitter**: 'to pay his debt.'
1222. **Cid**=*Seid* (Arabic)='Chief.'
1224. **envierai**: 'shall . . . grudge.'
1229. **honte**: not here in the sense of 'shame,' but of 'modesty.'
1230. **conte**: old-fashioned spelling for *compte*; in modern French the phrase would be *trop de cas*.
1237. **engage**: 'pledges' or 'binds.'
1239. **dans l'excès**: 'excessive' would not convey the sense, 'exceptional' would serve here.
1242. **plus au long**: at greater length.

1246. **sollicita**: 'appealed to': *i.e.*, had the effect of arousing or stirring.
1250. **me montrant . . . je hasardais**: 'had I showed myself . . . I should have risked.'
1261. **tant, etc.**: 'so thoroughly (did the most timid take heart on seeing us).'
1264. **lors** = *alors*.
1268. **part**: in modern French *partie* would be used.
1269. **la garde**: it will be remembered that the King had ordered the guard to be doubled.
1279. **abusant**: 'deceiving.'
1297. **alfanges**: 'scimitars.'
1308. **ne l'ai pu savoir**: the *l'* refers to *où le sort inclinait*: *i.e.*, 'I could not tell which way the battle was going.'
1317. **pour souffrir**: the sense is that their panic would not permit them to look to this duty.
1319. **engagés**: 'caught' or 'cut off.'

## SCENE IV

The news of Chimène's approach is none too welcome to the King. He bids Rodrigue withdraw and Don Diègue assume a downcast air, so that Chimène's real feelings for Rodrigue may be disclosed by a ruse. The nature of these feelings is already known to us, but the King needs this information to enable him to decide on his course of action in what may prove a difficult interview.

1333. **pour tous remerciements**: 'the only thanks I can give you.'
1334. **avant que**: *avant de* would now be used.

## SCENE V

By making Chimène believe that Rodrigue is dead, the King convinces himself of her continued love for him. But, learning that she has been tricked, she recovers herself and pretends that her display of emotion was due to disappointment that Rodrigue should have died honourably in battle instead of at the hands of justice. Then, since the King refuses to condemn a man who has served the State so well,

she invokes an ancient right and demands that some champion shall espouse her cause and fight a duel with Rodrigue. This request the King is anxious to refuse, but the fiery Don Diègue insists that his son should not shelter behind the King, but should defend his own honour. Chimène promises to wed the man who defeats Rodrigue. Don Sanche presents himself as her champion and is accepted. The King, however, modifies the terms so that Chimène shall wed whichever of the two is victor.

1338. *le succès*: not necessarily 'success,' but rather 'the outcome,' 'the event' (has fulfilled your expectations).
1340. *à nos yeux*: 'before our eyes': this is put in to make the story more convincing.
1343. *pâme*: 'swoons,' 'faints.'
1374. *mânes*: 'the shade,' 'the spirit.'
1375. *à*: 'by.'
1378. *lieu de franchise*: 'place of liberty:' *i.e.*, 'sanctuary,' 'refuge.'
1383. *croissons*: again, the transitive use of *croître*. She means that she is as soundly defeated as the two Moorish chiefs. Like them she must, so to speak, walk behind the triumphant victor's chariot.
1389. *d'accuser ce que*: 'denouncing the clemency which.'
1395. *poursuite*: the noun and the verb *poursuivre* occur frequently in this play. In the mouth of Chimène the meaning is always that of pursuit in law: *i.e.*, 'suing' or 'prosecution.'
1402. *je suis sa conquête*: 'I will be his.'
1407. *sous couleur de*: 'on the pretext of.' This represents Richelieu's own attitude towards duelling.
1409. *succès*: see note to line 1338.
1418. *sous votre défense*: 'through (or "by") your ban.'
1431. *qui*: the equivalent here of *celui que*.
1434. *où n'entrera personne*: Don Diègue means that there is really no need to limit the entry to one, since Rodrigue's reputation is such that in any case no champion would venture to oppose him: the observation is complimentary to his son, less so to Chimène!
1448. *Rodrigue a pris haleine*: the Unity of Time again! While this remark helps to compress the play within



the necessary twenty-four hours, it also underlines the improbability of so much consecutive action, as Corneille subsequently admitted in his *Discours de la Tragédie*.

1457. *sa peine*: 'his efforts.'

1461. *avouer*: 'supporting' or 'lending colour to.'

## ACT V

## SCENE I

Rodrigue seeks out Chimène to tell her that, since he holds his life forfeit to her, he will not defend himself against Don Sanche. She urges that for the sake of his own honour and reputation he ought to do his best to overcome Don Sanche. Rodrigue replies that his honour, on the contrary, will be enhanced by this action; it will also give Chimène the just vengeance that her honour demands, while making plain his own love for her. Only then does she entreat him to win, so that he and not Don Sanche shall, as the King has directed, become her husband. Exalted by this unmistakable proof of her love, Rodrigue leaves, now determined to defeat his adversary.

1467. *vous*: this depends on *dire* in the next line.

1475. *qui*: equivalent here to *qu'est-ce qui*: i.e., 'what,' not 'who.'

1479. *au besoin*: 'in (the hour of) need.'

1486. *ma seule querelle*: 'my (own) cause only.'

1497. *ils*: refers to *les coups*.

1499. *estomac*: although *poitrine* would probably be used now, the word *estomac* was then thought suitable for poetry. In the French view the English are needlessly diffident about using the English equivalent in polite conversation.

1512. *de ma possession*: 'of possessing me.'

1513. *conte*: see note to line 1230.

1515. *inégalité*: 'inconsistency.'

1528. *auprès de*: 'in comparison with.'

1536. *poursuivre*: 'to seek.'

1541. *eût*: 'had' is not strong enough here: 'held' or 'cherished' would be better.
1556. *sors vainqueur*: Scudéry and others thought this a scandalous avowal. But surely it is only under stress of circumstances that Chimène makes it, and it is one of the most poignant utterances in the play.
1562. *de la sorte*: 'thus,' 'in this way.'
1564. *trop peu que de vous*: an idiomatic phrase: 'you are too few': *i.e.*, 'it is beyond your powers to succeed.'

## SCENE II

For this soliloquy, as for Rodrigue's in Act I, Scene VI, Corneille breaks away from the Alexandrine. The Infanta examines her feelings and continues to regret both her own love-lorn state and the fact that, despite all that has happened, Chimène still loves Rodrigue.

1568. *ce fier tyran*: *i.e.*, the *respect de ma naissance*.
1572. *pour être*: 'although you are.'
1574. *d'avec*: the *de* is used when the verb denotes separation or distinction.
1575. *dit*: 'decreed,' 'fated.'
1590. *le don*: the poor lady still seems to imagine that, were he her equal, Rodrigue would be only too pleased to marry her, rather than Chimène. In fact the idea has never crossed his mind.

## SCENE III

Léonor very sensibly points out that, whatever happens, Rodrigue is lost to the Infanta, since either he will fall in the duel or else, according to the King's command, marry Chimène. Moreover, the latter alternative is more likely to come about, since Chimène chose the untried Don Sanche as her champion rather than one of the seasoned warriors of the court. Convinced at last, the Infanta resolves to conquer her weakness for Rodrigue, though she persists in thinking that it is her own generosity rather than Rodrigue's inclination that will unite the pair.

1597. où : equivalent here to *pourquoi*.  
 1601. courage : used here to mean 'heart.'  
 1605. qu'il s'en faut encor : 'how far it is from being so !'  
 prétendre : not 'pretend' or even 'claim : ' the meaning here is really 'hope (for).'
1616. le premier offert : 'the first man who comes forward.'  
 1622. défiance : 'misgiving.'  
 1624. force : 'will overcome,' 'will get the better of.'  
 1639. et quand : 'and even if.' The Infanta, in other words, is accepting the inevitable, but also endeavouring to save her pride by pretending to renounce claims which, outside her own imagination, do not exist.

## SCENE IV

The action of Scenes II and III took place in the Infanta's apartments. Now we are back in Chimène's house where, far less tranquil than Léonor has depicted her, she is awaiting the outcome of the duel. Since her interview with Rodrigue she has conquered her momentary weakness and is determined, despite the King's wishes, to continue to press for justice against her father's slayer, should Rodrigue emerge victorious from the encounter now in progress. Elvire, however, urges her to be less rigorous in punishing herself.

1647. où = *auquel*.  
 1650. le plus heureux succès : 'even the most favourable outcome.' Because, of course, she will either have to marry Don Sanche, who means nothing to her, or allow her father's death to go unavenged, to the detriment of her exacting code of honour.  
 1665. puissant moteur : in other words, God.  
 1675. la loi du combat : *i.e.*, the conditions under which the duel was sanctioned by the King.  
 1679. leur faire la loi : *leur* here refers to Chimène's sense of duty and to her father's death.  
 1680. celle = *la loi du combat*.  
 1683. quoi qu' : 'whatever.'  
 1685. gardez : 'take care' : in modern French *prenez garde*.  
 1691. un coup : 'one stroke.'

## SCENE V

Don Sanche, disarmed by Rodrigue, is required to lay his sword at Chimène's feet. Chimène, however, jumps to the conclusion that Rodrigue is dead and overwhelms Don Sanche with reproaches.

1711. *un même coup*: 'one (and the same) blow.'

## SCENE VI

No particular locality is mentioned. One would expect the King to remain in his palace, yet Chimène, in the previous two scenes, was presumably in her own house. Again, therefore, Corneille leaves the exact locality vague and, in performance, this would arouse no comment. That, after all, is what matters. Believing Rodrigue to be dead, Chimène admits her love for him and begs leave to enter a convent instead of being compelled to marry Don Sanche. The King explains that Rodrigue is alive and unhurt.

1762. *une amour*: in line 1756 and elsewhere this noun is masculine: in old French it was feminine and this survived alongside the masculine, especially in poetry.

1766. *dégagée*: 'redeemed.'

## SCENE VII

Rodrigue presents himself before the King and the rest, telling Chimène that he will make no resistance to her wishes, but that he will undertake any task or suffer death at her hands, provided that she does not doubt the sincerity of his love. Chimène cannot pretend to the King that she does not love Rodrigue, but protests that it is not right that she should be obliged to marry the man who has killed her father. The King, however, is confident that in time she will consent. Meanwhile Rodrigue shall carry the war into the part of Spain still occupied by the Moors and, when he has thus gained even greater glory, Chimène no doubt will be proud to marry him.

1773. To the last the Infanta persists in generously bestowing what is not hers to give.

1779. **point**: in modern French this would be omitted from this construction, the *ne* sufficing with *ni . . . ni*.
1798. **pour vous en revancher**: not 'to revenge yourself for it,' but 'in return for it' (seventeenth century).
1820. **sans marquer de temps**: the King means that nothing was said to the victor about marriage having to take place immediately after the duel, so there would be no harm in postponing it.
1835. **quoi que**: would now be *quoique* 'although.'



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